

Offering a "Sacrifice of Praise": Human Vocation, Culture-Making, and Cultivating a Sabbath Imagination

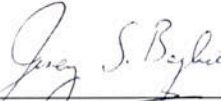
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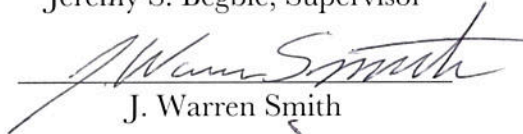
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Norman Wirzba

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Theology in the Divinity School  
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ABSTRACT

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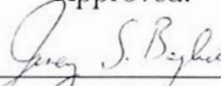
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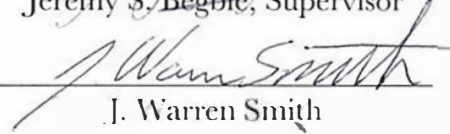
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## **Abstract**

This dissertation consists of an examination of the human cultural vocation in relation to the created order at large, with particular reference to the writings of theologian Colin Gunton, and writer, poet, and cultural critic Wendell Berry.

Gunton presents a vision of the human vocation within the created world as offering a “sacrifice of praise,” a vision with a distinctive stress on the agency of the Holy Spirit, in which the concepts of perfection, particularity, relationality, and mediation play determinative roles. Humans are enabled to participate in the Holy Spirit’s perfecting of creation through cultural practices that support personal particularity and mediate interpersonal relations between God, humans, and non-human creatures. This vision seeks to both integrate and uphold the integrity of all dimensions of cultural life – the Good, True, and Beautiful or ethics, knowledge, and art – in contrast to what Gunton sees as the fragmented yet homogenizing ethos of postmodern culture.

However, despite his stated concern for particularity, Gunton offers little in the way of particular concrete exemplification of what a “sacrifice of praise” or its related “ethic of createdness” looks like in practice except for the celebration of the Eucharist. The vision of “sacrifice of praise” as presented by Gunton is not sufficiently generative of specific cultural, artistic, or ecological practices that will enable persons to participate in the Holy Spirit’s perfecting of creation.

It is argued that the integrative imagination of Wendell Berry, as embodied by his Sabbath poetry and poetic practice, can be employed to meet the deficiencies of Gunton’s vision, providing powerful, concrete exemplifications of Gunton’s major concerns and

developing his concepts of perfection, particularity, relationality, and mediation further. Berry argues that locally adapted poetry is a practice that enables the formation of a sympathetic and placed imagination, such that humans can perceive ways to work in harmony with the material creation. Crucial to this practice and formative process is a rich vision and goal of Sabbath and, consequently, Sabbath-worthy work. His account of poetry and his own poetic output, together with analogous (agri)cultural practices, constitute a fully integrated vision of human culture – imagination, work, economy, and the arts – that advances the main trajectories offered by Gunton.

These two accounts of the human vocation resonate generatively because Gunton and Berry both operate from perspectives that keenly recognize the God-giftedness of creation. Berry’s perspective is from the “ground up” as it were, in part utilizing the practice of poetry to attend to particularities in light of a holy vision of Sabbath rest. Gunton’s perspective is more overtly and rigorously theological, governed above all by a theology of the triune economy and the outworking of the economy within the created order, particularly the perfection of creation by the Spirit. Berry’s Sabbath vision, as embodied in his poetic practice, brings two key resources to Gunton’s pneumatological vision of the human vocation as offering a “sacrifice of praise”: i) a concrete and particular *example* of human engagement with place and culture-making that exemplifies Gunton’s desire for fully integrated cultural engagement of the True, Good, and Beautiful, and ii) an *expansion* of Gunton’s vision of the human vocation vis-à-vis creation, that is, a “sacrifice of praise,” by including the cultural category of work and economy.

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All of my love and thanks to my husband and favorite person, Brent Smith. You believed I could do this and helped make that belief come true. And to our little Lillian Grace Hathaway Smith who mercifully waited to come a mere day after the defense! This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my father, Gordon Hathaway, who passed during my time at Duke.

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**Part I:**

**Colin Gunton and the Human Engagement in Creation as  
Offering a “Sacrifice of Praise”**

## Introduction

### Human Culture-Making in the Context of Modernity

*We have turned ourselves into mere consumers,  
knowing the price of everything  
and the value of very little.<sup>1</sup>*

*Colin E. Gunton*

The fast-paced, transitory, and consumerist nature of contemporary American culture has rendered faithful human engagement with, and care of the created order difficult. This dissertation examines the human cultural vocation in relation to the created order at large, with particular reference to the writings of Colin Gunton's and those of writer, poet, and cultural critic Wendell Berry.

For theologian Colin Gunton, disengagement from the God of Christendom and its displacement of this God from the center of meaning and unity of being is the theological root of many problems facing modernity.<sup>2</sup> This displacement has resulted in

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<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "The Spirit as Lord: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom," in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, edited by Andrew Walker (London, U.K: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 169.

<sup>2</sup> Gunton uses the term "modernity" throughout *The One, the Three and the Many* to refer mainly to a cast of mind reaching its high point with the Enlightenment and extending into our current era. A constellation of attitudes are associated with modernity for Gunton, including the intentional intellectual rejection of the Christian faith (one that he views as worthy of rejection because of modernity's poor construal of the doctrine of creation), a worldview that involves the disengagement and displacement of God and thus inadequate renderings of four perennial theological issues: the one and the many, particularity, relationality, meaning or truth. (Bradley G. Green, "Colin Gunton and the Theological Origin of Modernity." In *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, edited by Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 166). Although modernity is currently

the alienation, fragmentation, and homogeneity that he sees as especially characteristic of contemporary culture.<sup>3</sup> A consequence of “disengagement” is modernity’s instrumental stance toward both body and world. As Gunton understands it, disengagement from God leads humans to treat persons and other creatures as objects instead of beings to whom they are integrally related. The term “displacement” refers, for Gunton, to the way in which God no longer plays a unifying role in realm of meaning. This role has been replaced by human reason and human will.

The failure to recognize God as the source of creation’s unity and meaning has resulted in a loss of a “universal system of coordinates” that relates everything to God and God to everything else.<sup>4</sup> For Gunton, the term “coordinates” is crucial, “for it implies a system in which particulars are truly related to one another, and yet in such a way that ‘space’ remains between them. We need coordinates if we are to know who we are and what our world is.”<sup>5</sup> In losing these coordinates, modernity has lost sight of humanity’s appropriate stance toward and relationship with the world. Human reason and will – as well as human desires, fantasies, and sins – become the unifying interpreters of human experience.

Yet, a world that is “unified only by us ceases to be any kind of shared context for human society.”<sup>6</sup> Gunton notes that the modern pluralism of secular cultures tends to

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a contested term, when discussing Gunton’s work I will follow his usage. Otherwise, I will use the term “contemporary” when referring to current Western culture, particularly in the U.S.A.

<sup>3</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

deny particularity and individuality, instead breeding homogeneity. Without a genuine universal to connect all social relations in such a way to sustain plurality and particularity, false universals – which Gunton variously identifies with the public, “the people,” the market, and history – fill that role without being able to actually perform an effective unifying function.

Gunton identifies the theological root of this pattern of disengagement and displacement as a displacement of eschatology and, as such, a displacement of the Holy Spirit’s ministry.<sup>7</sup> Since the Spirit is no longer believed to be the one who brings new creation into being or transforms the present life into an anticipation of the life to come, humans begin to believe they have the sole responsibility to bring about the future. This situation has significant consequences for how contemporary humans view their place in the world and their relationship with the material created order: “It thus falls to the human agent not only to impose patterns of rationality on to recalcitrant nature, but to determine its future also.”<sup>8</sup>

The solution to this culturally destructive pattern, according to Gunton, is first to reject the “great illusion of modernity that we create the future.”<sup>9</sup> Then, humans should embrace “the more modest desire to shape it by considered action in the present, for [the illusion of modernity] generates an incapacity to live in the present, with what is given.”<sup>10</sup> This will include repositioning God, particularly the work of the Holy Spirit, to the center

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

of creation's meaning. This repositioning will recover humanity's orienting coordinates within creation, redefining the human vocation in creation.

Gunton's work presents a vision of the human vocation within the created world as offering a "sacrifice of praise," a vision with a distinctive stress on the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is an eschatological vision of creation's perfection by the Spirit, one we will explore through the themes of mediation, relationality, and particularity. We will see that in Gunton's view, as the perfecter of creation, the Spirit brings creatures into saving relation with the Father through the person and work of Jesus Christ. By "enabling things to be [and become] themselves," the Spirit upholds creation's otherness and enables the in-breaking of eschatological perfection within fallen time.<sup>11</sup>

In light of the Spirit's mission to orient creation towards eschatological perfection, Gunton believes that humans are enabled to participate in the Spirit's perfecting of creation through cultural practices that support personal particularity and mediate interpersonal relations among God, humans, and non-human creatures. Always dependent on the Spirit, human participation in the project of creation takes the form of liberating and particularizing creatures to be what they were created to be, a "sacrifice of praise" to God. This vision seeks both to integrate and uphold the integrity of all dimensions of cultural life – the Good, True, and Beautiful; or ethics, knowledge, and art – in contrast to what Gunton sees as the fragmented yet homogenizing ethos of postmodern culture.

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<sup>11</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, *Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 192.

In Part I of this dissertation, I will focus on Gunton's vision for the human vocation in creation. In Chapter 1, we shall see that, in Gunton's view, that a central aspect of the Holy Spirit's economic mission is to perfect, and thus particularize, the created order. The purpose of this chapter is to lay a theological foundation for his claim, explored in chapter 2, that the human vocation is to participate in the Spirit's perfecting mission. Thus, chapter 2 shows that, according to Gunton, the human vocation in creation is to offer one's life as a "sacrifice of praise" and thereby, through various forms of culture-making, participate in the Spirit's mission to eschatologically perfect the created order.

At the end of chapter 2, we identify a lack of concrete exemplification of "sacrifice of praise" as a weakness of Gunton's vision. Despite his stated concern for particularity and his helpful grounding of the human vocation in the work of the triune God, Gunton offers little in the way of particular concrete exemplification of what a "sacrifice of praise" – or its associated "ethic of createdness" – looks like in practice. The vision of "sacrifice of praise," as Gunton presents it, is not sufficiently generative of specific cultural, artistic, or ecological practices that will enable persons to participate in the Holy Spirit's perfecting of creation.

In chapter 3, we turn to Gunton's unified vision for human culture that emerges through his use of the categories of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. In this chapter we argue that Gunton's vision for integrated forms of culture-making calls for particularizing practices that combine embodied ways of knowing and imagining the world with a concern for the right use of material things; we identify both art making and aesthetics as key loci for the practice of particularizing and thus potentially participating

in the Spirit's perfection of the created order through a "sacrifice of praise." Gunton's vision of culture-making does not succeed in offering a concrete program for offering such a sacrifice, but it does point us in a generative trajectory: art making as a particularizing practice that can assist persons in engaging the created order.

Following this trajectory, in part II we turn to the Sabbath poetry and Sabbath practice of Wendell Berry for a concrete example of how art making can inform and shape human culture-making. The central argument of this dissertation is that Wendell Berry's integrative imagination, as embodied by his Sabbath poetry and poetic practice, can be employed to meet the deficiencies of Gunton's vision, providing powerful, concrete exemplifications of Gunton's major concerns and developing his concepts of particularity, relationality, and mediation further. Berry's locally adapted poetry constitutes a practice that enables the formation of a sympathetic and placed imagination, such that humans can perceive ways to work in harmony with the material creation. Crucial to this practice and formative process is a rich vision of Sabbath and, consequently, Sabbath-worthy work. Berry's account of poetry and his own poetic output, together with analogous (agri)cultural practices, constitute a fully integrated vision of human culture – imagination, work, economy, and the arts – that advances the main trajectories offered by Gunton.

Chapter 4 explores Berry's understanding of the imagination and its connection with poetry and other forms of human making, his vision of the world's wholeness and holiness, and the cultivation of a locally adapted imagination. In this chapter we will see that, according to Berry, a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination allows humans to come to know and indwell their places by enabling them to perceive creation's wholeness,

and that Berry cultivates this form of imagination in practices of poetry that wrestle with the limits and propriety of language in relation to a particular place.

After chapter 4's overview of Berry's understanding of the craft, ends, and goals of locally adapted poetry and imagination, chapters 5 and 6 specifically engage with his Sabbath poetry. Composed over the last forty years or so, Berry's Sabbath poetry represents a committed, sustained attempt to engage his local place and to train his imagination.<sup>12</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 will argue that Berry's Sabbath vision is an integrated and integrating vision of wholeness, one that intentionally imagines the holiness of place in relation to God and seeks the health of the place and its membership through Sabbath-worthy work. His imagination connects a vision of the human place in the created order with practices of work and economy via the practice of poetry. This fully integrated vision of human culture thus exemplifies Gunton's concerns.

These two accounts of the human vocation resonate generatively because both Gunton and Berry operate from perspectives that keenly recognize the God-giftedness of creation. Berry's perspective is from the "ground up," as it were, in part utilizing the practice of poetry to attend to particularities in light of a holy vision of Sabbath rest. Gunton's perspective is more overtly and rigorously theological, governed above all by a theology of the triune economy and the outworking of the economy within the created order, particularly the Spirit's perfection of creation. Berry's Sabbath vision, as embodied

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<sup>12</sup> Due to concerns for space and clarity of function, we will limit our engagement of Berry's poetic corpus to his Sabbath poetry and not his other collected poems. Though many of the same themes appear in both, the stated goals of his Sabbath poetry provide a window into how Berry understands his relationship to his place, his relationship between his art and his place, and the relationship between God, place, and art.

in his poetic practice, brings two key resources to Gunton's pneumatological vision of the human vocation as offering a "sacrifice of praise": i) a concrete and particular *example* of human engagement with place and culture-making that answers Gunton's call for fully integrated cultural engagement of the True, Good, and Beautiful, and ii) an *expansion* of Gunton's vision of the human vocation vis-à-vis creation, to offer a "sacrifice of praise," by incorporating the cultural sphere of work and economy.

## Chapter One

### Holy Spirit as the Perfecter and Particularizer of the Created Order

*When you consider creation I advise you to first thank Him who is the first cause of everything that exists: namely, the Father, and then the Son, who is the creator, and then the Holy Spirit, the perfecter.<sup>1</sup>*

*St. Basil the Great*

#### 1.1 Introduction

Colin Gunton proposes a theology of culture and human engagement with the material creation that is rooted in the triune God's relationship with the created order, and in this way responds to what he identifies as the flaws of a fragmented modernity. Gunton's insights into human culture-making arise from his trinitarian vision of creation, particularly his view of the perfecting ministry of the Holy Spirit. He presents a vision of the human vocation within the created world as offering a "sacrifice of praise," a vision with a distinctive stress on the agency of the Holy Spirit, in which the concepts of mediation, particularity, and relationality play determinative roles. Humans are enabled to participate in the Spirit's perfecting of creation through cultural practices that support personal particularity and mediate interpersonal relations between God, humans, and non-human creatures. This vision seeks both to integrate and uphold the integrity of all

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<sup>1</sup>St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand, vol. 42, *Popular Patristic Series* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 62; XVI.38.

dimensions of cultural life, in contrast to what Gunton sees as the fragmented yet homogenizing ethos of postmodern culture. This chapter presents Gunton's account of the Holy Spirit as eschatological perfecter of creation in order to lay the groundwork for understanding the role human culture can play in the ongoing perfection of the created order. We will argue, in conversation with Gunton, that a central aspect of the economic<sup>2</sup> mission of the Holy Spirit is to perfect, and thus particularize, the created order.

Three categories will help frame this chapter's consideration of the role of the Spirit as the perfecter of creation – the themes of mediation, relationality, and particularity.<sup>3</sup> These three themes are central to Gunton's writing on the relation between

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout his work Gunton uses the traditional term “economy” to refer to all God's actions *ad extra* – all that God does “outside” God's own being – actions that are to be understood in the light of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. This term is useful to him because it was, for the early Church Fathers, a way “of integrating a plurality, of maintaining the richness and diversity of the ways of the one God towards the world” (Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 158). As used in the Christian tradition in reference to God, “economy” integrates the doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, and eschatology while still recognizing them in their distinctness. Gunton is especially influenced by Irenaeus's use of the concept, whereby “Irenaeus was able to allow history to be itself, by virtue of its very relation to God. Because all that God does is achieved by means of his two hands, the Son and the Spirit, it is done both effectively and in due recognition of the integrity of created being” (ibid., 158–59).

Gunton explains that the concept of economy provides “(1) a conception of God's action in and to the world which is diversified within fundamental unity; and (2) along with it a conception of worldly happening that is diversified and open because it is embraced by eternity” (ibid., 160). The concept also realizes “a new way of being in the world,” in which the supreme divine generosity overcomes human economic conceptions of reciprocity and prudence (ibid., 158).

<sup>3</sup> Uche Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity: An Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2016), 22. Anizor proposes particularity, relationality, and mediation as three central motifs of Gunton's thought. I have adapted these three motifs in this chapter to help clarify how Gunton understands the relationship between the Holy Spirit's work in perfecting creation and the human vocation to offer a “sacrifice of praise” through engagement with the created world. Although, as John Webster notes, Gunton never presented a systematic analysis of the concept of mediation, the focus of

the Spirit and creation. Our consideration of the Spirit's economic mission in creation will proceed in that order. Gunton presents the Holy Spirit 1) as the mediator who perfects creation's otherness and draws the project of creation toward its eschatological fulfillment, and 2) as the one who constitutes creatures' being through a perichoretic relationality analogous to the perichoretic relations within the trinity, and 3) as the particularizer of the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, which itself provides a model for the renewal of all matter.

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much of his later work. Instead, the term mediation often acted "as a kind of summary term for a gospel-governed understanding of the triune God's activity relation to created reality" (John Webster, "Gunton and Barth," in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 21). Gunton does offer an overview of his understanding of a theology of mediation and the doctrine of creation in the first section of *The Christian Faith*, which was published the year before his death. See Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford, U.K.; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

Gunton himself, in *The One, the Three and the Many*, identifies *perichoresis*, relationality, and substantiality (his synonym for particularity) as the three open transcendentals that he explores in order to lay out a trinitarian theology of culture (210ff). Bernhard Nausner offers a succinct summary of Gunton's three open transcendentals: "*Substantiality* expresses the insight that the particular is the most real and basic notion of existence.... In virtue of this, *relationality* indicates that the particular is only particular due to its relatedness to other particulars. *Perichoresis* exhibits the fact that this relatedness is a mutual, reciprocal and dynamic process of indwelling in which one cannot be thought of without the other" (Bernhard Nausner, "The Failure of a Laudable Project: Gunton, the Trinity and Human Self-Understanding.," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62, no. 4 (2009): 412).

Although the transcendental status of relationality, particularity, and *perichoresis* has been called into question, this dissertation does not depend on the affirmation of any such status. Following Anizor, this chapter and the following will use the themes of mediation, relationality, and particularity as a structuring device to explore the concept of perfection.

## **1.2 Mediation: The Holy Spirit as the Mediator of Perfection**

### **1.2.1 The Holy Spirit as Mediator of the Project of Creation**

Central to Colin Gunton's doctrine of creation and his understanding of the concept of "perfection" is the affirmation that creation is a project that was created good and relatively perfect, but also with an eye to its eschatological perfecting through ongoing engagement with the Creator.<sup>4</sup> He writes, "The creation is not a static and timeless lump of matter, but...something with a direction and destiny."<sup>5</sup> The perfection of the sixth day of creation was a penultimate perfection and is "understood only in the light of a completion that is to come."<sup>6</sup> Creation's initial goodness was not dependent on its ultimate perfection but instead is oriented toward it as a goal. The fulfillment of creation's perfection will come only when there is "universal at-one-ment" between the created order and the triune God.<sup>7</sup>

Although a doctrine of creation from nothing affirms creation as an act "of divine sovereignty and freedom," Gunton rejects any sense of arbitrariness at work in it,<sup>8</sup> arguing that creation originates from God's love. Creation, like a work of art, "is a

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<sup>4</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, *Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 55. Also, "The will of God is realized through a kind of community of love, so that the centrality of the trinitarian mediators of creation ensure the purposiveness of the creation, its non-arbitrary character. The creation has a purpose: the world is made to achieve perfection through time and to return completed to its creator" (Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 120).

<sup>5</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23," *Dialog* 35, no. 1 (1996): 38. Emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "The Doctrine of Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 141.

project, something God wills for its own sake and not because he had need of it.”<sup>9</sup> This project finds its meaning in its very otherness, although this otherness, this difference from God, is not a denigration, and the perfection of the created order never makes it anything else but material.

Gunton does not conceive of creation’s ultimate perfection as a predefined or predetermined form. Instead, creatures are enabled to participate in the ongoing perfection of themselves and the entire project of creation. As we will explore in the following chapters, humans are invited to share in this project and are “enabled by [God] to shape things of beauty, truth and goodness.”<sup>10</sup> This participation, although enabled and mediated by the Spirit, is “open” and welcomes created creativity. As Gunton writes, “The future is ‘open’ because the Holy Spirit is the one who enables things to become what they are made to be by relating them to the Father through the one who became incarnate.”<sup>11</sup> The created order is perfected through the relations established between it and the Father through Jesus Christ and the Spirit. Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection “both realizes and guarantees” God’s commitment to creation’s ongoing and ultimate perfection by restoring the project of creation to the correct orientation in the power of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>10</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

<sup>12</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 37.

Following Irenaeus, Gunton describes the Son and the Spirit as the “two hands” of the Father, mediating God’s economic relation with the world.<sup>13</sup> Through his two hands, the Father relates to all of creation. He needs no intermediate beings between him and the world. That is to say, God is God’s own mediator.<sup>14</sup> The two hands of God – God God’s self as Spirit and Son – work from within the structures of creation to renew creation’s order. The Spirit’s economic work relates creation to the Father through the Son.<sup>15</sup> This construal of divine mediation affirms both God’s freedom to work in and perfect the creation and creation’s relative independence and goodness.<sup>16</sup> In order to distinguish, yet not divide, the actions of the Son and Spirit in relation to creation, Gunton identifies the Spirit as the agent of transcendence – the “hand” active in the world but not identical to any part of it – and the Son as the agent of immanence, the one

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Holmes notes that the language of the Son and the Spirit as God’s “two hands” is absent from Gunton’s work prior to *Christ and Creation*, the publication of his 1990 Didsbury Lectures. Yet, when it appears, “it appears here almost fully formed,” and explicitly in connection with Gunton’s conviction that mediation is fundamental to an account of person-in-relation (Stephen R. Holmes, “Towards the Analogia Personae Et Relationis: Developments in Gunton’s Trinitarian Thinking,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 41).

<sup>14</sup> Or as Gunton himself would write, “What you see is what you get” (Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 12). Anizor remarks, “The point here is straightforward: if God works through *his* two hands, then they must be intrinsic to the being of God” (Anizor, 39; emphasis in original).

<sup>15</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 143. The Holy Spirit “enables an omnipresence which is not the homogenous presence of a container but the presence of one enabling the world to be and become truly itself. This is the case because the Holy Spirit, as the one who perfects creation, achieves the creation’s true plurality by relating the ‘many’ to the Father through the Son” (ibid.).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 54. Note, however, that although both the Son and the Spirit are mediators of creation they have distinctive functions. The Son mediates a certain structure and form to creation, while the Spirit mediates relationships between various entities (William B. Whitney, *Problem and Promise in Colin E. Gunton’s Doctrine of Creation, Studies in Reformed Theology; Volume 26* (Leiden, NL; Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 93).

who becomes flesh and thus an identifiable “part” of the world.<sup>17</sup> Through this mediation, the integrity and multiplicity of the created world is maintained in the midst of its close relation to God because it is held in personal relationship with God by the Spirit, rather than being in some form of ontological continuity with God.<sup>18</sup>

### **1.2.2 The Incarnate Life of Jesus as the Model for the Spirit’s Mediation of Creation’s Perfection**

It is the incarnation that provides Gunton with a model for the mediation of the Spirit’s perfection of creation.<sup>19</sup> “The hinge on which all turns,” Gunton believes, “is the incarnation.”<sup>20</sup> The Spirit is the Lord, the Giver of Life. But the life that the Spirit brings is one that is imaged for us centrally in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The Spirit’s mediation of Jesus’s incarnation is our paradigm for how the Spirit works in creation for its perfecting, just as the Spirit’s particularization of the humanity of Jesus, as discussed

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<sup>17</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972–1995* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1996), 108. Gunton further remarks, “The Son *becomes* flesh; the Spirit acts *towards* and *in* the world” (ibid., 113); “The incarnation of the Son is...a transcendent immanence; that of the Spirit, an immanent, involved, but eschatological transcendence” (ibid., 119).

<sup>18</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 143. Webster notes that Gunton is uneasy with Western Christianity’s way of construing the doctrine of God. In the relation between God and the world, he sought neither “unrestricted transcendence” nor “unrestricted immanence,” both of which are forms of dualism. Instead, Gunton aims, by emphasizing “mediation” by the two hands of God, to conceive of a way in which the material creation can act as a medium for divine action and make possible a world that is enabled “to be itself” in relation to the triune God. (Webster, “Gunton and Barth” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 22).

<sup>19</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 80. Also, “The incarnation provides our chief model of mediation. God’s actions in Christ are sovereign and achieve their end, but they respect our createdness and personhood. But the incarnation happens through the Spirit, too, and in that respect God’s actions in the Spirit serve to bring about those things God purposes in Christ” (ibid.).

<sup>20</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

below in the section on particularity, provides a model for thinking about created particularity.

Gunton is emphatic that any discussion of the Holy Spirit is a discussion of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit works to actualize in advance the peace of Christ's eschatological reign, anticipating the new creation in the midst of the old creation. The Spirit draws humans with all creation to the Father through the Son. Therefore the Spirit, along with the Son, mediates God to creation, and all of the Spirit's actions are consistent with the mission of the Son. The distinctiveness of the mission of the Spirit can be found in the way in which the Spirit relates persons to one another, to creation, and to the Father in Christ.

In his article "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters," Gunton highlights four themes concerning the relations between Christ, Spirit, and creation. First, the incarnation of the second Person of the trinity by the will of the Father through the power of the Spirit is a particular instance of God's continuous engagement with the created order.<sup>21</sup> This action reaffirms the image of God in humanity, showing that a human being "is what it is only in dependence on the Spirit of God."<sup>22</sup>

Second, the incarnation itself includes redemptive actions, such as the healings and exorcisms performed by Jesus. These actions free the created order to more perfectly praise its maker, to be what it is called to be. This is not to deny that creation praises its maker as it is, but to signal that "without healing it cannot praise its maker as universally

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<sup>21</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 2 (2002): 197.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

as it should.”<sup>23</sup> Third, “Wherever the Spirit is, there the true end of creation is anticipated,” and we see this most fully in the raising of Jesus from the dead.<sup>24</sup> The Spirit is both the Lord of Life and the Lord of *Everlasting* Life, the life that imbues our everyday mortal bodies and the life that is to come in the new creation.

Fourth, the themes of incarnation, soteriology, eschatology come together in Gunton’s final theme, ecclesiology. By calling twelve disciples, Jesus instituted “a form of culture in the broadest sense, a form of living together in response to God’s covenant mercies.”<sup>25</sup> Principally embodied in Christian worship and the Lord’s Supper, this form of life remembers Christ’s incarnation and resurrection, as well as the salvation wrought in his blood. The eucharist is celebrated both in memory of Christ’s actions, as well as in symbolic communion with the created order (the natural elements that through the manipulation of human culture make up the bread and fruit of the vine), prefiguring its final perfection.<sup>26</sup>

In the whole of Christ’s incarnate life, and especially in the resurrection, the Spirit is God in action enabling this particular creation to be what it was created it to be. The Spirit is the one who relates the Son to the Father, forms Christ’s human body, drives him into the wilderness, and raises this same Jesus from the dead – all particularizing actions by the Spirit in the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Jesus’s life is the single, particular human life that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>27</sup> David A. Höhne’s central critique of Gunton’s theology of particularity in his book *Spirit and Sonship* is its lack of *scriptural* particularity. He echoes Webster’s observation that “When [Gunton’s] theology does not persuade, it is usually because he does not pause sufficiently long over exegetical or historical description, or because he assumes the

has been liberated by God to live into the fullness of perfected life.<sup>28</sup> In the Spirit, “The man, Jesus Christ, the mediator of salvation is first of all mediator of creation so that finally he might be eschatological mediator, recapitulating, summing up, all things in himself.”<sup>29</sup> So too, the Spirit liberates humans, in Christ, to enact truly human lives that

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validity of his presuppositions and presses ahead to draw corollaries” (John Webster, *Systematic Theology after Barth*,” in David F. Ford, ed. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 262). Höhne notes that, in several places, “Gunton’s foundational works on Christology lack evidence of the elemental role of Scripture in the form and content of Christology” (David A. Höhne, *Spirit and Sonship: Colin Gunton’s Theology of Particularity and the Holy Spirit* (Farnham, U.K.; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010), 21). He charges that “the foundational nature of Scripture for the form and content of Christology is by no means evident in practice,” (ibid., 36) and that “the paucity of Gunton’s exegetical description” (ibid., 35) leads to “sweeping generalizations” (ibid., 36). In light of these critiques, Höhne seeks to support Gunton’s claims about the Spirit as the particularizer by following Gunton’s theological trajectory but validating it with an exegesis of Luke’s gospel. He concludes that Gunton’s claims about the Spirit’s action in particularizing Jesus’s personal being and identity is substantiated by Scripture. “Closer attention to the narrative of Scripture only strengthens Gunton’s position on particularity understood as an eschatological work of the Spirit” (ibid., 14).

<sup>28</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 142. He adds, “The central point is that the Spirit, as the Lord and giver of life, has here [in the resurrection] to be understood in terms of God’s enabling the creation to become that which it was created to be. The two defining miracles [Jesus’s birth and resurrection] are thus not simply miracles, but point to the fact that it is through this particular, truly human, life that the ‘creation itself is liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God’” (ibid.). However, Anizor notes that several scholars call into question Gunton’s Christology on this point. They are concerned that identifying the Son’s agency to his human nature as empowered by the Spirit leaves little for the Word to do. “Gunton’s emphasis on Jesus’s humanity sometimes appears to eliminate the significance of his being the Word incarnate and at times actually tends to separate the actions of Word and Spirit instead of seeing these action in their *perichoretic* unity” (Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*,” 282; Cited in Anizor, 120). If all of Jesus’s divine operations and actions are on account of the Spirit, the Word, “it would appear that the Word somehow ceases to be divine, or his divinity is radically suppressed, at the incarnation” (ibid., 121). This accusation looks dangerously “zero-sum” and seems very much at odds with – and disregards – Gunton’s commitment to see God’s perfection of creation as a Spirit-enabled collaborative project.

<sup>29</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “One Mediator ... The Man Jesus Christ: Reconciliation, Mediation and Life in Community,” *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 2 (2002): 158.

live into the fullness of creation and hint at everlasting perfection. The Spirit is thus the mediator for Christ the mediator, mediating creation to the Father in Christ and God to creation.

### 1.2.3 The Holy Spirit as the Perfecter of Creation

Gunton calls upon St. Basil of Caesarea in support of his characterization of the Spirit as the perfecter of creation.<sup>30</sup> Basil writes in *On The Holy Spirit*, “When you consider

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<sup>30</sup> David Höhne has critiqued Gunton’s use of St. Basil’s idea that the Spirit is the “perfecting cause” of creation. Höhne contends that in Gunton’s enthusiasm for his desire to find support for the Spirit as the one who perfects and establishes particularity, Gunton overlooked the fact that this quote from St. Basil comes from a section in which he is talking about the perfection of *angels*. “The angels are perfected yet, ‘not out of a process but from creation itself straight to perfection’” (Höhne, 12). Although Höhne seeks ultimately to vindicate and strengthen Gunton’s idea of the Holy Spirit as particularizer by attending to scripture, particularly Luke and Acts, Gunton’s use is actually substantiated elsewhere in Basil’s writing. Basil goes on to explain the perfecting role of the Spirit in light of the trinitarian economy:

The operation...of the Father who works all in all is not imperfect; neither is the creating work of the Son incomplete if not perfected by the Spirit. The Father, who creates by his sole will, could not stand in any need of the Son, but nevertheless he wills through the Son; nor could the Son, who works according to the likeness of the Father, need cooperation...but the Son too wills to make perfect through the Spirit.... You are, then, to perceive three [*hypostases*], the Lord who gives the order...the Word who creates...and the Spirit who confirms.... And what other thing could confirmation be than the perfecting according to holiness? This perfecting expresses the confirmation’s firmness, unchangeableness, and fixity in Good (*De Spiritu Sancto* 16.38, as cited in Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2012), 305).

Here Basil is not only thinking of the perfection of angels, but the perfecting role of the Spirit in the operations of the divine economy in creation. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will to work together to order, create, and perfect the creation, and in so perfecting, draw it into participation in God’s holiness. Although the fullness of creation’s perfection will not occur until the eschaton, the process of perfection begins at the first creation.

Nor is Basil the only patristic source Gunton could have drawn from in describing of the Spirit as perfecter. Paul Blowers notes that “Broadly speaking, in patristic theology and piety, the *creative* mission of the Holy Spirit in concert with the Father and the Son revolved around four cognate activities consistently (but not exclusively) associated with the Spirit: *animating, sanctifying, beautifying, perfecting*” (ibid., 292; emphasis in original). These

creation I advise you to first thank Him who is the first cause of everything that exists: namely, the Father, and then the Son, who is the creator, and then the Holy Spirit, the perfecter.”<sup>31</sup> Gunton extrapolates from Basil’s identification of the Spirit as the perfecter of creation to show that the Spirit is the one who guides to completion each creature by bringing it into saving relation with the Father through Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Gunton characterizes the Spirit as the perfecter of creation in at least two senses. First, the Spirit is the “perfecting cause” of creation because as the Lord and Giver of Life, the Spirit “gives reality to *the world* by perfecting what the Father does through his Son: originating what is truly other.”<sup>33</sup> The Spirit upholds the integrity of the created order in its relation to God, enabling it to be and remain truly other than God. In this first sense of perfection, the Spirit perfects otherness. God perceives the creation as “very good” because it is an other that has been perfected by the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> Second, the Spirit is the eschatological perfecter of creation’s otherness, guiding it to its eschatological completion “in the fullness of time.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, the Spirit mediates the completion of

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four activities support the idea that “*Creating was an overarching and open-ended project of the divine economy that included nurturing, shaping, renewing, actualizing hidden potentialities, transforming, finishing*” (ibid., 292; emphasis in original). Blowers’s summary of the perspective of the early church fathers on the role of the Holy Spirit in creation only supports and enriches Gunton’s claims.

<sup>31</sup> St. Basil the Great, 62; XVI.38.

<sup>32</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 189.

<sup>33</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Intellect and Action: Elucidations on Christian Theology and the Life of Faith* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 2000), 104. Emphasis in original.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 105.

the project of creation. As Gunton writes, “The Spirit is the Father’s agent enabling the created order in all its material concreteness to be and do that for which it was created.”<sup>36</sup>

In this latter sense – “enabling things to be [and become] themselves” – the role of the Spirit is, according to Gunton, distinctly *eschatological*.<sup>37</sup> The Spirit enables the goodness of creation to anticipate its intended eschatological perfection, which after the fall requires reconciliation with God and liberation from sin.<sup>38</sup> The Spirit enables creation to truly be itself, maintaining creation’s integrity throughout the trinitarian work of sustaining, upholding, perfecting, and redeeming creation. Even more than that, the Spirit, who “performs the divine actions of the end time in the here and now,” makes present in this sinful and alienated age, “that which belongs to the age to come.”<sup>39</sup> Not only is creation oriented toward its perfected end, anticipations of that future perfection are made present by the Spirit.

#### **1.2.4 Perfection and Providence**

This second sense of the Spirit’s mission as the perfecter of creation also can be considered in light of two kinds of divine action: general and particular providence. In a

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<sup>36</sup> Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972–1995*, 118.

<sup>37</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

<sup>38</sup> In response to Gunton’s contention that creation is a project, Terry Wright, concerned with Gunton’s apparently ambivalence towards issues of determinism, asks: “If redemption is the Spirit-inspired, Christ-structured movement of creation towards a greater end than its beginning, is the fallenness of the world *necessary* to implement the eschatological perfecting of creation?” (Terry J. Wright, “Colin Gunton on Providence: Critical Commentaries,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 151). This question seems to miss Gunton’s central assertion, following Irenaeus’s account of recapitulation, that creation was always intended to be a project, with or without the fall. For Gunton, even without the fall Christ would have been incarnate and humans would have participated in the Spirit’s perfecting of creation.

<sup>39</sup> Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972–1995*, 119.

fallen world, perfection, in the aforementioned second, teleological sense – enabling creatures to be and become themselves as they were created to be – requires liberation from sin and reconciliation to God. According to Gunton, “God’s providence is his action both within and alongside the structures of the world he has created so as to both *uphold* and *shape* the direction of things according to their proper season.”<sup>40</sup> Gunton’s understanding of the Spirit’s work of perfecting draws on the theological concept of providence, but not in a way that one would expect from a scholar in the reformed tradition: he focuses on God’s *actions* instead of God’s foreknowledge or will.

Gunton makes a tentative distinction between general providence – the actions of the Spirit in upholding and eschatologically guiding the order of creation – and particular providence – the salvific or redemptive divine acts directed to restoring the correct directedness of creation through Christ and the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> The Spirit both upholds creation and redirects creation to its eschatological destiny through the particular work of Jesus Christ. Yet, Christ’s work in atonement enacts both general *and* particular providence; it brings forth the redemption of human persons as well as the renewal of a broken creation.<sup>42</sup> In Jesus Christ through the Spirit, the Father has acted to reorient the project of creation, “*and so*,” Gunton emphasizes, “enables the continuation of so-called general

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<sup>40</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 34. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 176. Also, “The Spirit is...God present to the world as its liberating other, bringing it to the destiny determined by the Father, made actual, realised, in the Son” (Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972–1995*, 122).

<sup>42</sup> Anizor, 69.

providence.”<sup>43</sup> That is to say, general providence and the eschatological ordering of creation require the reconciling mission of the Son.

Providence, then, consists of actions of the Spirit in upholding the ongoing project of creation toward perfection in Christ.<sup>44</sup> Even the act of upholding creation, on Gunton’s account, resists a static portrayal: “The perfecting of the creation sometimes involves the maintaining of the order of things in its regularity, sometimes the restoration of a lost order; and sometimes the eschatological transformation of the world into anticipation of that which it will become.”<sup>45</sup> In working to perfect the creation, the Spirit actualizes its eschatological perfection in the present as anticipation and blessing. Although the Spirit works within creation’s structure to bring about its eschatological destiny, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ witness to God’s freedom over the world and God’s power to disrupt and interrupt creation’s time with its eschatological future.<sup>46</sup> In this way, the distinction between two forms of providence is blurred – in upholding creation the Spirit upholds through eschatological intention. The Spirit upholds creation a way that begins to anticipate its future transformation.

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<sup>43</sup> Wright, “Colin Gunton on Providence: Critical Commentaries” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 147. Emphasis in original.

<sup>44</sup> Whitney notes, “Mediation is the term Gunton uses to describe *how* God interacts with his creation, while providence is described as God’s action through the Son and Spirit to uphold and sustain the created order. However, both terms are related since both describe aspects of God’s relations with that which he has created” (Whitney, 82).

<sup>45</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 161. Also, “We must take account of the fact that providence can be understood in our world only in respect of the fact that its present shape is now distorted, so that within God’s providing are embraced acts devoted at once to *maintaining* the direction of the universe to its perfecting; and to *redirecting* its movements away from dissolution to its proper destiny” (Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 35).

<sup>46</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 10, 16, 19.

It is important for Gunton that the Spirit leads the creation *forward* to its eschatological destiny, not necessarily “upwards” in the sense of evolutionary or social progress.<sup>47</sup> Instead, he advocates a construal of the created order’s eschatological renewal that “accepts the necessity of a transformation of history if it is to move towards its goal. It is a form that must go through the narrow gate of the historic cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, Gunton emphasizes, all acts of particular providence derive their shape from the shape of Jesus’s life, death and resurrection. As he writes, “The Spirit is both the one who upholds the human Jesus in the truth of his being and calling and the one who, by mediating the Father’s action in raising him from the dead, transforms his body to the life of the world to come.”<sup>49</sup> The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a microcosm of the Spirit’s work in creation. And since “Creation is not merely through Christ, but *to* him: from the beginning, it has an eschatological thrust. Salvation takes place *within* the created and material order with an eye to the perfection of that which was begun.”<sup>50</sup> Perfection is ordered to Christ, which means that it is ordered to the particularity of his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Spirit is both the one who upholds the everyday world, enabling relationality and integrity of human action, and the one who will finally transform the entire creation in Christ.

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<sup>47</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 187. This is not to say that God could not choose to use evolutionary mechanisms to orient creation toward perfection, but that so-called social progress or evolutionary advancement is not automatically to be assumed to be God’s perfecting intention.

<sup>48</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 37.

<sup>49</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 177.

<sup>50</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation, Didsbury Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, U.K.: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 97. Emphasis in original.

Gunton is clear that providence is based in God's actions, not in impersonal mechanistic forces; these actions are "God's dealings with particulars in creaturely time and space."<sup>51</sup> Jesus is God's providence made particular and personal, the "concrete realization in person of God's providential dealings with his people."<sup>52</sup> God's particular acts of providence did not begin with Jesus's incarnation, however, but paradigmatically with the election of Abraham. Election and providence, for Gunton, are less about the ultimate destinies of individuals than about individuals and communities that are singled out with a view to the salvation of humanity and the renewal of the entire created order.<sup>53</sup> The church, therefore, can trust that, like Jesus and Israel, the Spirit is both upholding its being and calling in the world, and working to reconcile individuals through the Church, to the Father through Jesus Christ. Christians are being both sanctified for the life to come and sanctified in our dealings with creation here and now, enabling acts that anticipate the new creation.

This construal of providence – focusing on act instead of knowledge – allows Gunton to leave "space" for interactions between creatures and other created things.<sup>54</sup> He believes that providence "is less deterministic if handled pneumatologically because it suggests divine action which enables something to move from an uncompleted or

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, "Colin Gunton on Providence: Critical Commentaries" in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 155.

<sup>52</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, "Colin Gunton on Providence: Critical Commentaries" in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 156. Wright adds, "Although, in principle, God could unleash a storm of untethered divine power to accomplish the divine ends, in reality God's power is tempered by acts of election, whereby God elects to accommodate divine action to the structures of the world through interaction with certain inhabitants, and supremely in the incarnation of the Son by the Spirit" (ibid., 158).

<sup>54</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 183.

unsatisfactory present to a completion that is destined, but not fully determined, in advance.”<sup>55</sup> On this account, creatures have the freedom to participate in their own perfecting, but are not forced to act in certain ways.<sup>56</sup> All beings will be perfected, but Gunton attempts to leave space for that perfection to take a myriad of potentially faithful forms.

### **1.2.5 Perfection as a Relational Construct**

Growth into eschatological perfection via the work of the Spirit is linked intimately for Gunton with the *praise* of God. He asks, “What is the end of creation? That all things may through being perfected praise the one who made them.”<sup>57</sup> This is a relational construal of perfection, consistent with Gunton’s identification of the Spirit as the mediator between God and the created order. The ultimate goal of creation, and thus the entire point of creation’s perfection and its need for the transforming work of Jesus Christ, is praise of God.

The purpose of the Spirit’s perfecting work, ultimately, is to bring creatures into right relationship with the triune God and other creatures in a way that affirms their integrity and particularity, enabling a relation-in-otherness that resists attempts at homogenization. Perfection is the fulfillment of creation’s being and purpose in *relation* to God’s being and purposes, not attaining some predetermined form. Creatures have the freedom to participate in their own perfecting.<sup>58</sup> This is a dynamic and generative

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, “Colin Gunton on Providence: Critical Commentaries” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 148.

<sup>57</sup> “Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 96.

<sup>58</sup> “The Spirit sets the creation free to be itself, and so directs it as God’s other to yet find its perfection in the fulfillment of its relation to God. God’s power, and that is a

perfecting that is evaluated in relation to the human vocation to praise God for, in, and through creation. The Spirit liberates the created world from the patterns of sin, freeing it to become what it was created to be.<sup>59</sup> Gunton does not seem envision “perfection” as either static or predefined. Rather, the form of finite perfection humans and their culture can take is always dynamic and responsive in relation to the praise of God.<sup>60</sup>

Believing that modernity has lost the perspective of creation as a project, Gunton argues that “We need to recover the notion of creation as a project...something God creates not as a timelessly perfect whole, but as an order of things that is planned to go somewhere; to be completed or perfected, and so projected into time.”<sup>61</sup> Creation is finite and created from nothing, but even so, is created to go somewhere under the aegis of the

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concept frequently used of the action of the Spirit, consists in enabling, in directing the creation to perfectedness in freedom” (ibid., 90–91).

<sup>59</sup> For Gunton, although the Spirit liberates the creation from sin, even if there had been no fall the Spirit would still be the perfecter of creation, allowing it to be even greater at the end than it was at the beginning. Likewise, the Son would have become incarnate in the creation even without the fall. What the fall did is determine the form that the Son and Spirit’s mediation would take. See also ibid., 95.

<sup>60</sup> This is also important because one could conceive of the language of creation’s perfection as antithetical to human culture and engagement with creation. For example, “to realize the true being” of a tree could mean that the *telos* of each tree is to remain a tree. This would rule out, then, the use of this tree to make a chair. However, if we conceive of “perfection” instead as a “state of praise,” then there is space in the idea of the Holy Spirit’s perfecting work as the one who mediates between creaturely relationships to keep all relationships and particularities – even the death of a creature – in a state of praise to God. Thus human participation in the perfection of creation does not entail leaving creation alone – although it definitely could include that – but instead engaging a relationship with the natural, cultural, and built environments in such a way as to render these relationships as praise and thanksgiving to God.

<sup>61</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 36.

Spirit.<sup>62</sup> Humans, particularly Christians, are called to participate in the project of perfection. That is to say, “Christ is risen, you have work to do.”

### **1.2.6 Summary**

This section has described Gunton’s characterization of creation as a project oriented toward the goal of eschatological perfection. God creates the heavens and the earth out of love for and commitment to a being other than God’s self. Reflecting this commitment to creation’s otherness and relative self-determination, God enables creatures to participate in and shape their own perfecting. The “two hands” of God – the Spirit and the Son – mediate God’s relation with the created order, with the Spirit being the chief agent of creation’s perfecting. As the perfecter of creation, the Spirit brings creatures into saving relation with the Father through the person and work of Jesus Christ. By “enabling things to be [and become] themselves,” the Spirit upholds creation’s otherness and enables moments of eschatological perfection within fallen time.<sup>63</sup> Both of these are providential actions of God: sustaining creation amidst fallenness and liberating it from sin in order to restore its directedness toward perfection.

The incarnation is the paradigmatic model and instantiation of how the Spirit mediates Christ’s saving work in the Spirit’s perfection of creation. Perfection is the Spirit’s actualization of Christ’s eschatological reign, drawing creation forward and anticipating it in the midst of the old creation. These varied anticipations of new creation are modeled on the life and work of Jesus as enabled by the Spirit. Like Jesus, humanity

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<sup>62</sup> “There is, that is to say, no nature that *maintains itself* in being – the underlying suggestion of so many so-called natural theologies – but only a creation that is upheld against the inbreaking of chaos and death by the power – that is, the Spirit – of God.” (Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 194–95).

<sup>63</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

becomes what it was meant to be only through the Spirit's action. This engagement with creation often takes the form of liberation because the creation requires healing to become what it was created to be, both in this life and the life to come; the keenest example of this is the Spirit's raising Jesus from the dead. Most importantly for the theme of mediation, by calling disciples, Jesus was instituting a new form of human culture where remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection are central. For Gunton, the Spirit is the continuing mediator of Christ's reconciling work, actualizing the future reconciliation of creation within the present.

### ***1.3 Relationality: The Being of God as Particularity-in-Relation***

#### **1.3.1 Triune Perichoretic Relations Model Relational Particularity**

The following two terms we will consider – relationality and particularity – could also be described together as “relational particularity” or “particularity-in-relation.” Particularity is a function of relationality, yet true relations can occur only between particulars. They cannot, finally, be separated. For the sake of clarity, however, this dissertation will focus first on relationality – with the triune relations as our model – and then on particularity – considering more closely the particularizing actions of the Spirit within creation, especially the Spirit's role in particularizing the humanity of Jesus.

The focus on the concept of “particularity” and the particularizing work of the Spirit is a distinctive aspect of Gunton's theology.<sup>64</sup> In *The One, the Three and the Many*, Gunton identifies the drive to homogeneity in modern thought and culture as a

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<sup>64</sup> Whitney, 91.

significant threat to the integrity and personal existence of human beings.<sup>65</sup> In response to these tendencies, he calls for a theology of being “in which the particular bulks large.”<sup>66</sup>

By “the particular” Gunton envisions a theological concept that both upholds the integrity of individual persons and non-human creatures, and locates them within webs of interdependent personal relationships. He writes,

Particularity means precisely that: a vast range of ways of being and of being in relationship, all of which are in different ways personal – or should be. As we have seen, so many of the ways of being in our modern world deny our personal being in ways which distort our relationship to each other and the world. Here, God’s triune personal being stands as a model for ours: a being in which all accept their need of one another, while enabling all to be truly themselves.<sup>67</sup>

As this quotation expresses, creaturely particularity is a by-product of mutually constitutive relations with other creatures and God. By taking the triune being – understood through the lens of the economic missions of the Son and the Spirit to bring about the Father’s will in the incarnation and new creation – as the model for relationality, Gunton seeks to develop an understanding of created being that can uphold both particularity and diversity, individuality and community. In order to better understand Gunton and his concern for relational particularity – specifically the particularizing of the humanity of Jesus by the Spirit – we will first attend to how Gunton understands the perichoretic triune being as a model of particulars-in-relation.

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<sup>65</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 181. Elsewhere he writes, “Personal being is precisely what is at stake in this modern world. Wherever we look, the many – particular people with all their differences – are depersonalized by being swallowed up into the one, the mass, where individuality is suppressed in the interests of efficiency, economics and homogeneity” (Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 15).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 17.

For Gunton, the triune being is a generative model for understanding the sought-after type of relation between humans and the rest of creation. He seeks an understanding of the created order that is an analogy of perichoretic trinitarian relations. Arguing backward from the economy of salvation – God’s relations to the world, as seen through the revelation in Christ – Gunton seeks to cast light on the relationships of the trinity *in se* in order to “develop a trinitarian analogy of being (and becoming): a conception of the structures of the created world in the light of the dynamic of the being of the triune creator and redeemer.”<sup>68</sup> The relational particularity within the trinity stands as a model for human relations with one another and with the created order. He is then able to claim that, like the trinity, “The universe is not a blank homogeneity. Rather, there is a network of mutually constituting *particularities*: distinct beings who yet take the shape of their being from one another.”<sup>69</sup>

Gunton argues, via the trinitarian theology of mediation developed by Irenaeus, that God’s will “is essentially a particularizing will, a will giving rise to the existence and directedness to perfection of the world and the beings within it.”<sup>70</sup> The Son and the Spirit are, as the “two hands” of the Father, God in action in the world, through whom the triune God creates, upholds, reconciles, and perfects God’s good creation.<sup>71</sup> This

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>69</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 37. Emphasis in original.

<sup>70</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 54.

<sup>71</sup> “Our hands are ourselves in action; so that when we paint a picture or extend the hand of friendship to another, it is we who are doing it. According to this image, the Son and the spirit are God in action, his personal way of being and acting in his world – God, we might say, extending the hand of salvation, of his love to his lost and perishing creation, to the extent of his only Son’s dying on the cross.... The Spirit is the one sent by

trinitarian matrix allowed Irenaeus – and Gunton is following him – to develop a clear account of how God relates to what is not God.<sup>72</sup> It is the Father’s distinctive action in the economy of creation and redemption to initiate; it is the Son’s distinctive action in the economy to mediate between the Father and creation and so unify creation; it is the Spirit’s distinctive action in the economy to perfect creation through its particularization.<sup>73</sup> And yet, this is the action of the one God because each of the persons gifts the others “space” to be a particular and enact their particular action within the divine being-in-relation.<sup>74</sup>

Gunton then reasons from the economic work of the Spirit to the immanent work of the Spirit. He reasons, “If the Spirit works in a particular way in the economy as the one who perfects the creation, it is reasonable to suppose that he has a similar kind of function to preform in relation to the being of God, to the communion that is the life of God.”<sup>75</sup> The economic actions of the persons of the trinity shed light on who the persons are *ad intra*.

Following but going beyond Augustine, Gunton claims that the Spirit is the unifying factor between the Father and the Son and the one who upholds their

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the Father at Jesus’ request to relate us to the Father through him” (Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 10).

<sup>72</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Anizor, 43.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. Gunton on the divine actions: “The three are not individuals, for none of their actions can be identified except as it takes place in relation to the other two” (Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 143). The Son “is an agent *because* the Father sends and the Spirit empowers” (*ibid.*; emphasis in original).

<sup>75</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 190.

particularity.<sup>76</sup> Particularity, then, is lodged in the very heart of God. God is a communion of particular yet undivided hypostases – a substantial particular that is held in relation by other substantial particulars – without possessing an underlying universal substrate.<sup>77</sup> The Spirit perfects not only the creation but the trinitarian relations, enabling

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> There is much concern and confusion in the literature concerning the so-called “social trinitarians,” with whom Gunton is sometimes grouped. The key charge is, especially with regard to John Zizioulas’ work where the triune being is defined by “being-as-communion,” that the social trinitarians reduce the persons to their relations. To phrase it another way, these scholars confuse the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* or *ousia* and *koinonia*. Regarding critiques leveled against Gunton specifically, Bernhard Nausner argues, “since Gunton has abandoned the notion of *ousia*...he is forced to anchor the notion of God’s oneness in the universal notion of relatedness” (Nausner, 413). This, for Nausner, is “a violation of a vital distinction” between *ousia* and *hypostasis* because these terms are then connected on a “meta-level” (ibid., 413). Drawing on the work of Richard Fermer, Nausner notes that in the Greek Fathers in general and the Cappadocians in particular, *ousia* is never equated with *koinonia*. Since Gunton equates *ousia* with *koinonia* by emphasizing a *koinonia* of *hypostases*, Gunton is reducing *ousia* to *koinonia* (ibid., 414). Thus, according to Nausner, Gunton’s work is not able to maintain a balanced dialectic between substance and communion. He “dissolves the classic notion of the nature of God solely into the concept of *hypostasis*” (ibid., 418).

This line of critique, however, does not seem to take seriously Gunton’s commitment to the particularity of the divine persons or the role of the Holy Spirit as particularizer. Nausner opines, “The concept of particularity cannot be dissolved into the concept of relations and vice versa. Relations are in need of parts. If this balance is lost we have nowhere to go” (ibid., 415). I believe that Gunton would agree with this statement, as long as the “parts” are recognized as being whom and what they are only in relations with others and upheld by the Spirit. Nausner’s concern does not seem to get at what Gunton is arguing, which is that there is no way to have an autonomous “part,” a part that is not already in relation with other parts. Nor does this critique reflect Gunton’s emphasis on the Spirit as the one who particularizes in relationship, the one who prevents individual “parts” from being subsumed or homogenized into other “parts.” Gunton is committed to the particular, to the concreteness of particular beings in relation with other concrete particular beings. “The persons are...not relations, but concrete particulars in relation to one another” (Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1997), 39). This emphasis, which distinguishes Gunton from Zizioulas and other social trinitarians, helps prevent the reduction of substance into person into relation.

Similarly, Najeeb Awad argues “Colin Gunton strongly associates ‘*hypostasis*’ with ‘particularity’ and rejects the understanding of personhood in terms of individuality”

each triune person to “be themselves.”<sup>78</sup> The particularity of the persons of the trinity comes by way of their perichoretic relationship with one another, not despite it.<sup>79</sup>

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(Najeeb G. Awad, “Personhood as Particularity: John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, and the Trinitarian Theology of Personhood,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 4, no. 1 (2010): 16). He claims that for Gunton *hypostasis* is not equated with relation but with “person with relational particularity” (ibid., 16). Thus the relations of the three persons do constitute the divine being, but this does not reduce *hypostasis* to relation (ibid., 16–17). Awad points to Gunton’s concern to root the trinitarian relations in their economic relations with creation: “the trinitarian doctrine of revelation” (ibid., 17). For Gunton, the actions of the economic trinity reveal, but do not exhaust, the immanent trinity.

Wesley Hill’s article is also helpful in light of this critique. He observes that both sides – the 20<sup>th</sup>-century “trinitarian revisionists” (including Gunton) and their critics – are concerned with not reducing persons to relations. The revisionists look to the Western theological Tradition, centrally Augustine and Aquinas, and are keen to avoid mistakes they see therein: reducing persons to relations. Yet their critics accuse *them* of subsequently reducing persons to relations. Hill observes, “the critics of the trinitarian revisionist are accusing the revisionists of the *same thing* of which the revisionists are accusing the tradition” (Wesley Hill, “Divine Persons and Their ‘Reduction’ to Relations: A Plea for Conceptual Clarity.,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 (2012): 152; emphasis in original). Why the similarities? Both sides are concerned to maintain the distinction the oneness and threeness of God, yet this accusation of “reduction” is not helpful. Hill suggests, “Both the revisionists and their critics should simply drop the charge that the other side *reduces* the divine Persons to relations and should find other ways to articulate their disagreements” (ibid., 158; emphasis in original). Following Hill, I will assume that Gunton means what he says and is not guilty of reducing the persons to their relations.

<sup>78</sup> Anizor, 42. In moving from the outer to the inner life of God, Gunton makes the Spirit the perfecter of the trinitarian being. Anizor raises the question of whether “the divine communion of persons really need[s] to be perfected” (ibid., 52). Although Gunton works hard not to collapse the economic trinity into the immanent trinity, “it may be wondered whether the attempt to explicate the particularities of the persons and their true eternal personhood sometimes works against that desire” (ibid., 53).

<sup>79</sup> Cumin notes, “Before particularity was paramount for Gunton, the idea of communion held pride of place in his thinking. What we need to see now is the way these two key concepts appear to have slipped, at the mature end of his career, into a kind of loose opposition” (Paul Cumin, “The Taste of Cake: Relation and Otherness with Colin Gunton and the Strong Second Hand of God,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 74).

Cumin explains how, in Gunton’s work, communion shifts from being a way to explain the relations of the three trinitarian persons to needing to be grounded firmly in the particular. At the very end of his life, in his unpublished dogmatics, Gunton will even claim, according to Paul Cumin, that “Whatever we do we must not suggest that ‘being’

Particularity, as described here, is a correlate of *perichoresis*.<sup>80</sup> Thus Gunton can claim,

“The particularity of created beings is established by the particularity at the heart of the

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unifies. The Father unifies the Godhead by virtue of the fact that he is Father of the Son and breather of the Spirit, and is therefore eternally the ‘cause’ of the being of the Son and the Spirit” (CDT 2.7.31.3, cited in *ibid.*, 77). The Father becomes the particular that grounds the triune communion. Rooted in Gunton’s pneumatology, however, this claim does not “move unilaterally upward into the Father” as Zizioulas’ tends to do (*ibid.*, 78). The Spirit, as the one who perfects and completes the triune being, makes this claim for the Father as the cause of divine being less top down and more dynamic. Cumin suggests that this is actually fulfillment of Gunton’s use of the patristic concept of *perichoresis*: “Whereas the idea of divine interpenetration was formerly for him [Gunton] a kind of general description for the constitutive function of triune communion, it is here given a specific shape” (*ibid.*, 79). The Father may be the cause of the triune communion, but the Spirit is the one who enables the particularity of the persons to flourish in a communion of love. The Spirit’s work is to enable both relation and otherness. There is no relation *without* otherness or particularity.

Though, Gunton’s definition of what *perichoresis* means for the triune being also shifts throughout his career. In *The One, the Three and the Many*, *perichoresis* was about establishing ontological interdependence and reciprocity. In his unpublished dogmatics, however, *perichoresis* is merely the outcome of the persons-in-relation. *Perichoresis* “serves to demonstrate the character of personal being, not to constitute it” (CDT 2.7.31.2, cited in *ibid.*, 85, n71). The term shifts from doing work to characterizing an outcome (*ibid.*, 85).

<sup>80</sup> Anizor, 42. Gunton’s construal and use of the terms *hypostasis* and *perichoresis* are not without critique. Anizor notes that human personhood cannot be used to understand divine personhood and wonders of Gunton relies too heavily on human experience to understand trinitarian relations (*ibid.*, 50). Similarly, Richard Fermer argues that if Gunton looked closer at how the Cappadocians actually defined the term *hypostasis* he would note that what distinguishes the three persons is their “mode of origin.” Bruce McCormack notes that contrary to its original intention – to stress the oneness of God and God’s dissimilarity to creation – Gunton uses the term *perichoresis* to highlight the similarities between the trinitarian and human persons, thus putting the bodily particularity of humanity at risk. He claims that Gunton “so erodes the distinction between divine persons and human persons with his use of the concept of *perichoresis* that the recollection that humans are individuated by their bodily existence is not allowed to play the role it should” (Bruce L. McCormack, “The One, the Three and the Many: In Memory of Colin Gunton,” *Cultural Encounters* 1, no. 2 (2005); cited in Anizor, 51). Contrary to these critics, Gunton believes that the terms person, relation, and *perichoresis* can be applied univocally to God and God’s creatures because of the work of the Son and Spirit (*ibid.*, 51).

being of the creator.”<sup>81</sup> The communion that characterizes the trinitarian being exemplifies how three “persons” or *hypostases* can, in freedom and love, give and receive particularity to and from one another. Gunton then defines person in light of their relations: “The Father, Son and Spirit are *persons* because they enable each other to be truly what the other is: they neither assert at the expense of, nor lose themselves in the being of, the others.”<sup>82</sup>

### 1.3.2 Extending the Perichoretic Analogy

If the trinity is defined by relational *hypostases* particularized by the Spirit, and if humans are in the image of God, then humans are *hypostases* – personal beings – who image God’s relational nature. Therefore relational particularity is central to the being of humanity.<sup>83</sup> As mentioned above, *hypostasis* refers to a substantial particular that is held in relation by other substantial particulars, either persons or things.<sup>84</sup> Persons are particulars who are “established in their particularity by their relations with one another,” specifically in relations of love and freedom.<sup>85</sup> The transience of a particular being does not mean that it is not a substantial particular or that its reality is lessened. Accordingly,

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<sup>81</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 191. Emphasis in original.

<sup>82</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 16. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>83</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 196.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>85</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Persons,” in *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. Paul A.B. Clarke and Andrew Linzey (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 638 as cited in Anizor, 41.

Gunton argues that in order to rethink the person as a particular requires that we rethink the nature of material particulars.<sup>86</sup>

Rejecting a metaphysic that posits a substance or concept that underlies all reality, Gunton wants to strongly affirm that “something is real – what it is and not another thing – by virtue of the way it is held in being not only by God but also by other things in the particular configurations in space and time in which its being is constituted; that is to say, in its createdness.”<sup>87</sup> Relations between sensual particulars are essential for reality. The things that we can hear, see, taste, touch, and smell are “the real.” That is to say, “Things are important *as things*.”<sup>88</sup>

Extending the perichoretic analogy even further, Gunton then applies it to all created being, not only humans. He explains, “An analogy between the thing and the person can be developed. Both persons and things are hypostatic in the sense of being substantial particulars, and rendered such by the patterns of relations that constitute them what they distinctively are: with God in the first instance and with other temporally and spatially related particulars in the second.”<sup>89</sup> Errors in perception, recognition, or understanding may occur and the various parts of substantial particulars can, indeed, be studied, but Gunton is concerned to uphold the fundamental importance of the concrete, sensual particular – things and persons are real and are wholes that are more than just a

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<sup>86</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 196.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 204. Emphasis added. Gunton goes on to explain, “Material particulars, are the most real things that there are, *because* the divine hypostases together constitute the being of God” (*ibid.*, 207; emphasis in original).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

sum of their explainable parts.<sup>90</sup> These patterns of relations constitute the frameworks in which human life occurs. The order of the world is itself “perichoretic in that everything in it contributes to the being of everything else, enabling everything to be what it distinctively is.”<sup>91</sup> All creatures are particulars in relation to other creatures and to God. This means that creation exists in relative freedom and is maintained in its own particular being in gracious relation to the triune Lord. Analogously, the Spirit also enables a form of *perichoresis* to take place between persons, things, and God. The Spirit is the “vehicle of openness to and respect for what is other than ourselves,”<sup>92</sup> opening us to the particularity of other persons and creatures.

Gunton’s extension of the analogy of *perichoresis* to the created order allows him to speak theologically of how God establishes reality. He writes, “To speak of divine *perichoresis* is to essay a conceptual mapping, on the basis of that economy, of the being of God: God is what he is by virtue of the dynamic relatedness of Father, Son and Spirit.”<sup>93</sup> Through the divine economy, which hints at the intra-perichoretic relations of the three divine persons, the created order’s time and space are established to be truly themselves as they are distinguished from the being of the Creator.

The particularity of finite, created things hinges on the hypostatic, trinitarian particularity of God’s own being. We can affirm relationships-in-otherness and reject homogenization, seeing the particulars in our complex world as good because of and not despite its particularity. As Gunton writes, “We can believe in the existence of the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 165.

material world because we believe in God.”<sup>94</sup> It is the Spirit who strengthens individual particularity and then relates these particulars to one another in relations that uphold that particularity. By affirming both features, Gunton is able to show how relationality does not necessarily lead to homogenization. A theology of being can, at once, affirm the real, particular creature and acknowledge that the creature’s being is established in mutual, interdependent relations.

### **1.3.3 Summary**

Gunton seeks to develop a model of relations between God, humans, and non-human creatures that upholds both particularity and diversity, individuality and community. Gunton speaks of particularity as “a vast range of ways of being and of being in relationship.”<sup>95</sup> He finds the model he is looking for in the relational particularity or particularity-in-relation of the triune persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the trinity are unity-without-homogeneity, honoring the particularity of the others as well as remaining in unified and interpenetrating perichoretic relationality. Assuming that God *in se* is reflective of God’s actions as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in economic relation to the created order, Gunton argues that particularity is at the very center of the divine being, with the Spirit as the particularizer of the divine being as well as creation. The persons and their actions cannot be conflated nor separated, but take their particular “shape” in relation to the others.

Having established the triune being as the model for particularity-in-relation, Gunton then extends this model analogically to human relations, and then to relations

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>95</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 17.

with all created beings. Particularity is a quality established in the midst of relating, as substantial particulars (or *hypostases*) are formed in relation to other substantial particulars. Although perichoretic relationality is only an analogy – creatures cannot fully interpenetrate one another’s beings in the same way as the divine persons – these patterns of relations provide frameworks in which creaturely life is lived before God.

## **1.4 Particularity: The Particularization of Jesus By the Spirit as a Model for Spirit’s Particularization of the Created Order**

### **1.4.1 The Spirit’s Perfecting Work as Particularizing Work**

If the Spirit, whose economic mission is to be the agent of God, “enabling things to be [and become] themselves,” then in Gunton’s estimation, the Spirit is not only the perfecter of creation but also, necessarily, its particularizer.<sup>96</sup> In perfecting creation, the Spirit upholds and enables all kinds of creaturely particulars to flourish in their own creaturely way. Gunton notes, “The Spirit’s distinctive work in the world is, by relating the creation to God through Christ, to give direction to its being and beings. One of the ways – perhaps *the way* – that the Spirit thus perfects the creation may be seen in the constitution of particularity.”<sup>97</sup> Gunton understands particularity to apply to “a vast range of ways of being and of being in relationship.”<sup>98</sup> As a theological concept, it links the integrity of individual persons, non-human creatures, and webs of interdependent

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<sup>96</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192. Wright helpfully distinguishes between particularizing and compelling. For Gunton, the Spirit prompts, sometimes forcefully and dramatically, the creation to mature towards its eschatological perfection (particularizing) but the Spirit does not violate the structure of creation (compelling) (Wright, “Colin Gunton on Providence: Critical Commentaries” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 156).

<sup>97</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 205. Emphasis in original.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

personal relationships in which they are located. To be particularized, on this account, is to be enabled to be truly oneself and yet “becoming truly oneself” requires accepting one’s need for and the limit of another.<sup>99</sup> That is, becoming oneself is found in, and not outside, relationships. For Gunton, the triune relations offer a model for how this works. He writes, “God’s triune personal being stands as a model for ours: a being in which all accept their need of one another, while enabling all to be truly themselves.”<sup>100</sup> God is God only as three persons and yet each person makes room for the other two to be distinctly themselves, with the Spirit particularizing each of the *hypostases*.

Characterizing the Spirit’s work within the triune being as “particularization” helps Gunton resist construing creation’s perfection as an undifferentiated unity. He writes, “The divine creation is...the constitution of particulars: not ideal and changeless forms but the one universe and the various things and persons within it.”<sup>101</sup> God’s creation of the world is the creation of – to use the language of David Kelsey – the “quotidian,” the absolute everyday-ness of actual places, persons, and creatures. For Gunton, contra Augustine (or, more accurately, contra his reading of Augustine),<sup>102</sup> God

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<sup>99</sup> Stephen Holmes notes that the terms “person” and “particularity” came to prominence in Gunton’s work only with his inaugural lecture at King’s College London in 1985. It had been absent in the first decade of Gunton’s oeuvre. This new development was influenced by John Zizioulas, whose work provided a way for Gunton to define the human person in light of the divine persons (Holmes, “Towards the *Analogia Personae et Relationis*” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 39). Holmes calls this change a “fairly fundamental revolution in his thought,” because it moves away from his initial reliance on Barth’s account of trinitarian Doctrine (ibid., 42).

<sup>100</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>102</sup> As many have argued, Gunton does not always read Augustine fairly or accurately. I acknowledge these critiques and affirm many of them. However, the outcome of these debates does not impact this dissertation’s argument, which does not

created concrete, material particularities, not eternal forms that were then instantiated in matter. The Genesis creation accounts celebrate the “this-ness” of created things, which is given and upheld by the ministry of the particularizing Spirit.

In *The One, the Three and the Many*, Gunton describes how Christ, the one in whom all things cohere, unifies creation. He is keen to distinguish this role from the action of the Spirit in “maintain[ing] the particularity, distinctiveness, uniqueness, through the Son, of each within the unity.”<sup>103</sup> The two hands of God are complementary in creating and redeeming creation, yet still distinct in their actions: “The Son [is] the giver of structure, and the Holy Spirit [is] the one who gives the world space to become within but not apart from the structuring.”<sup>104</sup> This point of relation is key because it means, again, that there is no platonic ideal form to which the Spirit is drawing the creation. To a certain degree, the final result has been decided – structure, a vision for harmony and peace with relationships of unity-in-diversity – but not all the creative individual details. The Spirit is drawing creation to perfection and enabling humans to perceive its structure, and enabling them to creatively improvise on what the structure might look like in their particular time, location, and place. Humans are not called to a homogeneous perfection or ideal.

Particularity, then, is the gift of God through Christ in whom all things hang together; yet this particularity is not fulfilled or perfected at the beginning of a creature’s

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rely upon any particular interpretation of Augustine. For insight into the critical issues, see Bradley G. Green, *Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine: The Theology of Colin Gunton in Light of Augustine* (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 2012).

<sup>103</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 206.

<sup>104</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

time, but is worked out in time and space through the ministry of the Spirit, who anticipates the eschatological perfection in the present.<sup>105</sup> He writes, “Human activity in and with the world becomes in that way part of the broader process in which human life as a whole may be offered to the Father in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>106</sup> Human activity, when enabled by the power of the Spirit to work despite sin and brokenness, can participate in the Spirit’s perfecting of the creation and offer a “sacrifice of praise” on behalf of creation and in union with Christ. We will explore the human vocation to offer a “sacrifice of praise” in the next chapter.

Although creation will not, finally, be perfected until the eschaton, Gunton believes that we can expect the Spirit, in the present, to enable anticipations of that perfection in a way appropriate to finite beings. He writes, “The pneumatological dimensions of creation theology accordingly allow us to develop an ontology of the material particular as that which is destined to achieve a distinctively finite completeness or perfection in space and through time.”<sup>107</sup> Gunton aims here to articulate an understanding of “finite perfection” that is neither static nor determined, but conceives “of finite realities as they are directed to the eschatological perfection that is promised, and sometimes realized from time to time in anticipation.”<sup>108</sup> The temporary duration eschatological actualization in the present is not a judgment on the reality of a given anticipation of perfection, but a function of natural change and human sin.

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<sup>105</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 208.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

In the time before the eschaton, “particular transformations and so projectings toward eschatological perfection take place as by the Spirit other created beings are brought through Christ to God the Father.”<sup>109</sup> These projectings, or limited transformations, are like “leavening” of the “already” in the “not yet.” Human creatures, in particular, are called to be perfected in and into the Body of Christ, to be persons who, through the Spirit, participate in the anticipations of the full transfiguration of all things at the end of time. This work on our part is a sacrifice of praise to the creator in thanksgiving for his gifts of creation and of Jesus Christ.

#### **1.4.2 The Spirit Particularizes the Humanity of Jesus of Nazareth**

The Spirit particularizes and perfects the humanity of Christ from conception to resurrection and so witnesses to the perfection awaiting the rest of the created order and, subsequently, witnesses to the way in which the Spirit particularizes and human persons to offer a “sacrifice of praise.” In the incarnation Christ respects human creatureliness and personhood through the power of the Spirit who enables Christ to live the true, perfect human life in praise to the Father. The Spirit allows Jesus Christ to constitute a true union-without-confusion of two natures, and thus to be, at once, fully divine and authentically human. Jesus of Nazareth, particularized by the Spirit, is, Gunton emphasizes, “the *only* one who, after the Fall, is enabled to be in true relation to God the Father and so truly human.”<sup>110</sup> As the human person formed in the womb of Mary by

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<sup>109</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 40.

<sup>110</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 73. Emphasis added. Elsewhere he explains, “In the perfect offering of himself to the Father through the eternal Spirit we witness one sample...of the creation in its integrity. By

power and mediation of the Spirit, he becomes “flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone” and “not merely the passive object of the eternal Son’s determination.”<sup>111</sup> The Spirit enables this particular part of the created order to embody perfection, to be what it was created to be: an instance of the praise of creation to God the Father. Even more than this, Jesus is also the true priest of creation, “who by virtue of his faithfulness and obedience offers to the Father the true sacrifice that is a perfect human life.”<sup>112</sup>

The Spirit freed Jesus – the whole *hypostasis* – to be himself, the true and perfect human being. Instead of focusing on the temptation narratives as an example of Jesus’s flesh warring with his divinity, for example, Gunton understands these events as the Spirit liberating the flesh to live into what it was called to be. He writes, “Jesus was enabled to resist temptation not by some immanent conditioning, but by virtue of his obedience to the guidance of the Spirit.”<sup>113</sup> Here, and throughout Jesus’s life, the Spirit mediates between the flesh and divinity of Jesus, allowing – in the words of Chalcedon – no confusion, change, division, or separation, while upholding their hypostatic particularity. The temptation narratives provide Gunton a model for human liberation and human freedom. As with Jesus, so to with us: the Holy Spirit liberates and “enables people to be constituted as *particular* persons in free and social relationships.”<sup>114</sup>

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virtue of its fallenness, the rest of the creation has lost its integrity, lost its directedness to perfection before God the Father. Although directed to an end which is perfection for the glory of God, the creation has, unaccountably but undoubtedly, fallen into disorder: that is to say, misdirection, disorientation and dissolution” (Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 57).

<sup>111</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 52.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. Emphasis in original.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>114</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “The Spirit as Lord: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom,” in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, ed. Andrew Walker (London, U.K: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 181–82. Emphasis in original.

The Spirit also maintains the particularity of the divine-human person in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gunton notes that the resurrection accounts all imply that the flesh of Jesus had been “transformed into the conditions of the age to come,” which is significant for Gunton because “this means that the perfection promised for the creation and realised through the work of the Spirit is centred here.”<sup>115</sup> In the resurrection, as in the conception and incarnation, a representative part of creation is enabled to be what it was created to be. Christ’s resurrected body realizes the eschatological fulfillment of creation’s perfection. Thus, for Gunton, “The two defining miracles [Jesus’s birth and resurrection] are thus not simply miracles, but point to the fact that it is through this particular, truly human, life that the ‘creation itself is liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God’ (Rom. 8. 21).”<sup>116</sup> In short, the Spirit particularizes and perfects the humanity of Christ from conception to resurrection and so witnesses to the perfection awaiting the rest of the created order.

Consequently, Gunton defends his account of *creaturely* particularity by harkening to fact that Christian theology is tied to the particularity of this single human life – Jesus of Nazareth. He argues, “To base a theology on the particularity of a human life is to render inseparable divine will and created particular, and at the same time to emphasize the centrality of embodiment in matter.”<sup>117</sup> In Christ, by the Spirit, the triune God creates particularity, maintains particularity, saves through particularity, and works

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<sup>115</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 61.

<sup>116</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 154.

<sup>117</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 54.

eschatologically to perfect creation's particular perfection. God is the God of the created particular, and to "behave toward the world as though we were God, we misconstrue and misuse in thought and action its characteristic particularity and otherness."<sup>118</sup> And to anticipate the theme of the following chapter, humans are a particular type of creature – one in the image of God – who is called to relate to other creatures in a specific way, often called dominion.

### **1.4.3 Summary**

This final section has concentrated on the particularity side of the concept of relational particularity or particularity-in-relation. The notion of the perichoretic relational particularity of the triune being serves as Gunton's analogy for how the creation relates to itself and to the divine persons. Through this means of relating, the Spirit enables creatures "to be [and become] themselves," or in other words, particularizes creatures.<sup>119</sup> The constitution of particularity, for Gunton, is key to the Spirit's perfecting work. This work complements the work of the Son, the unifier of creation and the giver of its structure. Perfection is found in the diversity of creaturely being-in-relation worked out through time. Gunton's paradigmatic image of this perfecting work is found in the Spirit's perfecting of Jesus Christ. The Spirit enables Jesus Christ to constitute a true union-without-confusion of the two natures, liberating the flesh to be in true communion with the divine *hypostasis* of the Son and therefore with the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>119</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

Father. In the bodily resurrection of the Son, the Spirit's perfecting work witnesses to the perfection awaiting the rest of the created order.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

As we saw in this chapter, under the theme of mediation, Gunton characterizes creation as a project oriented toward eschatological perfection. The “two hands” of God – the Spirit and the Son – mediate God's relation with the created order, with the Spirit being the chief agent of creation's perfecting. As the perfecter of creation, the Spirit brings creatures into saving relation with the Father through the person and work of Jesus Christ, while upholding the integrity of creation's otherness and shaping it toward eschatological perfection. The incarnation serves as Gunton's paradigmatic model of perfecting, with the Spirit actualizing Christ's eschatological reign by drawing creation forward and anticipating it in the midst of the old creation. Like Jesus, humanity becomes what it was meant to be only through the Spirit's action. The Spirit frees humans from the bondage to sin, freeing them to offer praise to God as they were created to.

Next, under the theme of relationality, Gunton develops a model of relations between God, humans, and non-human creatures that upholds particularity and diversity. Gunton speaks of particularity as “a vast range of ways of being and of being in relationship” and finds the model he is looking for in the relational particularity or particularity-in-relation of the triune persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>120</sup> Assuming that God *in se* is reflective of God's actions as Father, Son, and Spirit in economic relation to the created order, Gunton argues that particularity is at the very center of the divine

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<sup>120</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 17.

being, with the Spirit as the particularizer of the *perichoresis* as well as the created order. Gunton then extends this perichoretic model analogically to human relations and relations with all created beings. All particular creatures take their shape from one another via the Spirit as the “vehicle of openness.”<sup>121</sup>

Finally, we turned to the theme of particularity. The Spirit’s perfecting enables creatures “to be [and become] themselves,” which, is to offer praise to God.<sup>122</sup> The Spirit as perfecter of creation is, necessarily, also the particularizer of creatures. Particularity, he emphasizes, is a quality established in the midst of relating, not outside of it. The constitution of particularity is central to the Spirit’s perfecting and Gunton finds his paradigmatic image of this perfecting work is found in the Spirit’s perfecting of the divine-human person of Jesus Christ. Just as the Spirit enables Jesus Christ to constitute a true union-without-confusion of two natures, and in true communion with the Father, the Spirit liberates humans to be in relation to the Father through Christ. The Spirit’s particularizing work in the particular life of Jesus Christ is the foundation for creaturely perfecting and particularity.

Thus, chapter has presented Gunton’s account of the economic mission of the Spirit to perfect and thus particularize the created order. In it, we have attended to how Gunton characterizes the Spirit 1) as the mediator who perfects creation’s otherness and draws the project of creation toward its eschatological fulfillment, 2) as the one who constitutes creatures’ being through a perichoretic relationality analogous to the

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<sup>121</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 187

<sup>122</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 192.

perichoretic relations within the trinity, and 3) as the particularizer of the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth and which provides a model for the renewal of all materiality and the Spirit's particularization of persons.

The vision of creation as being perfected by the ongoing, particular, and loving intervention of the Spirit has implications for how humans engage with this broken yet directed creation, as chapter 2 will explore. It will, in light of this vision, consider the role of human beings in relation to the Spirit's perfecting of the created order. It will argue that according to Gunton the human vocation in creation is to offer one's life as a "sacrifice of praise" and, in so doing, participate in the Holy Spirit's mission to eschatologically perfect the created order

## **Chapter Two**

### **Offering a “Sacrifice of Praise”: Practices of Particularization as Participating in the Holy Spirit’s Perfecting of Creation**

*Through [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.*

*Hebrews 13:15*

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter we showed that, according to Gunton, a central aspect of the Holy Spirit’s economic mission is to perfect the created order. Gunton’s construal of the Spirit’s role as the perfecter of creation included 1) perfecting creation’s otherness and drawing the project of creation toward its eschatological fulfillment, 2) constituting creatures’ being through a perichoretic relationality analogous to the perichoretic relations within the trinity, 3) particularizing the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth and so providing a model for the renewal of all material beings and the particularization of persons. In this chapter we will elaborate on this vision of the Spirit’s role in creation by considering the role and calling of human beings within the created order.

We will argue that, according to Gunton, the human vocation in creation is to offer one’s life as a “sacrifice of praise” and, in so doing, participate in, through various forms of culture-making, the Spirit’s mission to eschatologically perfect the created order.

In Gunton’s writing, the phrase “sacrifice of praise” is often used as a placeholder for a cluster of associations, resulting in an image that is both intriguingly suggestive and frustratingly vague. This chapter will work to clarify Gunton’s construal of this term in relation to the human vocation to engage the created order, both in terms of the individual and the community, enabling the created order to be and become itself. Additionally, we will show how the Spirit’s perfecting and particularizing mission equips the Church to be a community that embodies, enables, and furthers the human calling to offer all of life as a “sacrifice of praise.”

Beginning with Gunton’s treatment of the “sacrifice of praise” and its relation to the language of perfection, we will explore this concept further through the three terms described in the previous chapter – mediation, relationality, and particularity – but in light of what these terms imply for created beings. This chapter aims at organizing various strands of Gunton’s thought and – where his thought is not fully fleshed out – making deductions about how these key terms fit together in order to present his overarching vision for humanity’s creaturely vocation: offering a “sacrifice of praise.”

## ***2.2 Offering a “Sacrifice of Praise” & Participating in Perfection***

### **2.2.1 Human Vocation as Offering a “Sacrifice of Praise”**

According to Gunton, “To be perfect is to praise or to be enabled to praise God.”<sup>1</sup> Praise is key theme throughout Gunton’s work, which consistently asserts that the human life is to be a “sacrifice of praise” to God in response to God’s work in creation. For

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<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes (Milton Keynes, U.K.; Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Press, 2008), 92.

example, “There is no God in the earth, but there is the Spirit who comes, through that same Son, to transform our personal being into that which it was created for, a living sacrifice of praise and thanks to God the Father.”<sup>2</sup> Praise is connected intimately with the work of the perfecting Spirit. He adopts here the language of Hebrews 13:15, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,” as the central metaphor for human engagement with human and non-human creation.<sup>3</sup> Not merely reserved for Christian worship, however, Gunton’s use of the term “sacrifice of praise” encompasses the whole human life.

Likewise, the church is called to a communal life characterized by thanksgiving and praise.<sup>4</sup> The church in worship – not limited to the liturgy proper but extended to the whole of its life in the world, and most fully when celebrating the eucharist – is the church realizing the human vocation. He writes, “The Christian life is first of all one of thanks and praise to God simply for what he eternally is,”<sup>5</sup> and the being of the church is rightly

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<sup>2</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 87.

<sup>3</sup> “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Ps. 50: 14); “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1); “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt. 2:5). Gunton does not typically cite any particular scripture passage when referring to the term “sacrifice of praise,” so his source could be one or all of these. I have chosen to highlight Hebrews 13:15 because it is closest to the grammar Gunton uses.

<sup>4</sup> Paraskeve Tibbs suggests, emphasizing the resonance with 1 Peter 2:5, that for Gunton “sacrifice of praise” “is in essence a definition of the priesthood of believers described by the Apostle Peter as the essential mark of communion with God” (Paraskeve Tibbs, “Created for Action: Colin Gunton's Relational Anthropology,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 122). This suggestion is consistent with Gunton’s concern for a relational understanding of the image of God and the vocation to offer all life as a sacrifice of praise.

<sup>5</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 85.

centered on communal worship.<sup>6</sup> The eucharist, for Gunton, offers a paradigm of correct human engagement with the created world. For Gunton, the “sacraments represent and inaugurate the perfecting of the creation by offering it through Christ to God.”<sup>7</sup> The eucharist constitutes an offering of thanksgiving to the Father through Christ and Spirit, with the work of human hands. Through this offering, the worshippers offer not only themselves but the whole created world in a graced anticipation of the final perfecting of all things.<sup>8</sup> Yet Christians enact this anticipation of perfection not under their own power, but only by the enabling of the Spirit.

Thus Gunton can claim, “The worship of the community is therefore to be seen as God’s chosen means by which the communion of the last days is realized.”<sup>9</sup> The church’s worship both offers a pattern for the rest of human life and concretely embodies – occasionally through grace and gift – the eschatological perfection of creation. This gift is not only for their own sake. It is for the sake of the world. Gunton writes, “As Jesus came to save a perishing world, so the church’s mission is to proclaim and embody the significance of his death and resurrection for all the realms of the world’s life.”<sup>10</sup> The church – and all the individuals therein – is to be a locus of perfection in a fallen world, a place where the human vocation to offer a “sacrifice of praise” to the triune God is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” *Dialog* 35, no. 1 (1996): 41.

<sup>8</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 2 (2002): 199.

<sup>9</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 40.

<sup>10</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford, U.K.; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 135.

realized; and in doing so, become a locus of human participation in the Spirit's perfecting of creation.

Not only do human beings offer individual and communal praise to God, creation was created to do so as well, although now it is marked and twisted by human sin.

Creation is a gift through which and for which humans offer thanksgiving to God by their concrete actions and relationships with other creatures, but always through the healing ministry of Christ by the Spirit. Gunton writes, "Creation praises its maker, as it is; yet without healing it cannot praise its maker as it universally as it should do."<sup>11</sup> Thus, after the Fall, part of the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise to the Father is to live and dwell in such a way that humans enable non-human creation to voice its praises as well.

### **2.2.2 Participating in the Project of Creation**

The Spirit's mission is to eschatologically perfect the created order, in part by mediating perfection and establishing creaturely particularity. In light of sin and disorder in the present world, this eschatological mission also takes the form of reconciliation in Christ, liberating and particularizing creatures to be what they were created to be, a "sacrifice of praise." Calling forward our discussion in previous chapter, the Son as the one who structures creation organizes a pattern for relations in creation while the Spirit mediates participation in these relations by bringing freedom-in-relation to created particulars.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 197.

<sup>12</sup> William B. Whitney, *Problem and Promise in Colin E. Gunton's Doctrine of Creation, Studies in Reformed Theology; Volume 26* (Leiden, NL; Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 124.

If creaturely perfection means “to praise or to be enabled to praise God,”<sup>13</sup> this perfection, even while empowered by the Spirit, is one appropriate for limited, fallen, yet redeemed creatures. It is not to be equated with the eschatological perfection to which the Spirit is drawing all creation. Yet there is a “redemptive quality” to this construal of perfection.<sup>14</sup> Humans are invited to participate in real and concrete ways in the history of God’s salvation of the whole created order.

In order to distinguish these two types of perfection, Gunton introduces the concept of “finite perfection.”<sup>15</sup> On this understanding, this-worldly perfection is oriented toward eschatological perfection and enables humans to “assess the approximations to final perfection which are all that can be achieved this side of the end.”<sup>16</sup> What Gunton seems to mean by “finite perfection” is a graced instance of creation’s eschatological perfection that is anticipated or witnessed to in this present context. It is not to be understood as the fulfillment of a pre-determined ideal of perfection. Gunton writes elsewhere that theological discussions on perfection cannot and should not pre-determine the form that any particular culture-making will take, rejecting any platonic overtones of the term “form.” Instead, “finite perfection” is a way of gauging how “in tune” particular sacrifices of praise and instances of culture are with the direction the Spirit is drawing

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<sup>13</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> Whitney, 173.

<sup>15</sup> “In some way or other, therefore, we need to be able to develop a concept of *finite* perfection, eschatologically construed, in the light of which to assess the approximations to final perfection which are all that can be achieved this side of the end. The central criterion will be whether an action, event or thing praises the one who made it, and praises it in the way he was praise by his incarnate Son” (Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 93).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

creation. This concept allows humans to say, “Yes, this cultural action approximates, in its limited creaturely way, the eschatological perfection of the coming new creation.”

### **2.2.3 The Church as an Echo of Perfection**

Gunton is clear in his work that one important locus of the Spirit’s ministry of perfecting creation is the creation and maintenance of communities that live out a culture focused on sacrifice of praise to God – namely the Church.<sup>17</sup> Although the local church, of course, exists in varying degrees of contradiction to its calling of praise and worship, it can, by the gift of the Spirit, participate in the Spirit’s perfecting of creation, becoming a “finite echo” of the divine perfecting.<sup>18</sup> Gunton uses the language of “echo” to describe an analogy between the triune God and Christian communities. It is key for him, however, that this analogy underscores an *indirect* relationship. Gunton wants to avoid making the doctrine of the trinity, as he thinks some social trinitarians do, into “a kind of principle of explanation and ethics.”<sup>19</sup> The church is not ontologically continuous with Christ or Spirit nor does its work replace that of the “two hands.” His trinitarian doctrine of creation serves as an intermediary step between God’s being and the church’s being.

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<sup>17</sup> Anizor notes, “The signature move in Gunton’s ecclesiology is the relentless attempt to root the nature and calling of the church in the being and action of the triune God” (Uche Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity: An Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2016), 147).

<sup>18</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community,” in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, ed. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1989), 69.

<sup>19</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1997), xix. Roland Chia notes, “The crucial intermediate step, according to Gunton, in developing an ontology of the church based on the doctrine of Trinity is a trinitarian theology of creation” (Roland Chia, “Trinity and Ontology: Colin Gunton’s Ecclesiology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 4 (2007): 454).

This is because the trinitarian mediation he has developed between God and creation both stresses their ontological discontinuity and implies their relation.<sup>20</sup>

Keen to uphold the ontological distinction between Creator and creation, Gunton links the church to the triune God only through God's personal relationship with the world as mediated by the two hands of Christ and the Spirit. The church is part of creation and as such is contingent and dependent upon the Spirit to relate it to the Father in Christ. The church can be an echo because it "points to the creative and recreative presence of God to the world."<sup>21</sup> As an "echo," the church has limited analogic value. This is because, first, it remains a creature and will correspond to God only in a creaturely fashion. And second, the church is a historical being that has not yet reached eschatological perfection.<sup>22</sup>

Instead, as an echo of the immanent relations of the trinity, the church embodies the interpersonal unity of "distinct but freely related persons."<sup>23</sup> The church exists as this echo when it is enabled by the Spirit to "realise in its life the promised and inaugurated reconciliation of all things."<sup>24</sup> The church, then, does not become the finite and temporal echo of the triune life by its own power. This fallible human community remains

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<sup>20</sup> J. H. F. Schaeffer, *Createdness and Ethics: The Doctrine of Creation and Theological Ethics in the Theology of Colin E. Gunton and Oswald Bayer*, *Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann*, 0563-4288; Bd. 137 (Berlin, DE: De Gruyter, 2006), 63.

<sup>21</sup> Chia, 461.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>23</sup> Gunton, "The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community," in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. Elsewhere Gunton writes, "The church is called to be the kind of reality at a finite level that God is in eternity" (Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 80). Hans Schaeffer raises an important question in regard to the church as "echo." Can we avoid understanding the Fall as irreparably distorting this analogy between God and the world? He challenges that "The character of our current world is not so 'ideal' that it really reflects the being of God" (Schaeffer, 99).

dependent upon the ongoing perfecting ministry of the Spirit to order its life such that it anticipates the reconciliation of all things in Christ.<sup>25</sup> The community lives into this relationship by offering all persons freedom-in-community, freedom for their particularity to flourish.

If “to be perfect is to praise or to be enabled to praise God,” and the human vocation is to offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, then the church as echo is the community in which this perfection-in-praise is realized.<sup>26</sup> Although Gunton does not use the language of “image” in relation to it, the church, as a finite echo and community of those in the image of God, images the divine perichoretic personal dynamics.<sup>27</sup> Since, for Gunton, the image of God emphasizes persons-in-relation, it is through worship that persons are able to stand (symbolically or temporarily at least) in correct relation to God and with others. Gunton notes that in the New Testament, Christians and the Church as

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<sup>25</sup> According to Anizor, “The main point is that the actual relations of concrete historical persons constitute the primary being of the church in the way that the hypostases-in-relation constitute the being of God,” called into being by the Holy Spirit (Anizor, 149). The church echoes the trinity when the Spirit enables it to order its life to the Word.

<sup>26</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 92.

<sup>27</sup> The concept of *perichoresis* is critical for the church community because it suggests that “there is no permanent structure of subordination, but [a relation] in which there are overlapping patterns of relationships” (Gunton, “The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community,” in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, 77). Gunton’s use of *perichoresis* affirms that, like the triune being, human beings – and thus the church – are constituted in relationship. Yet Chia cautions that for humans and the church, the concept of *perichoresis* is limited and only an analogy. “There can be no direct correspondence of the interiority of the divine persons to that of human persons” (Chia, 465). Instead, “In the church there is found through the indwelling of the Spirit among Christians a mutual internalization of personal characteristics, as each person gives himself or herself to others, and also takes up other into himself or herself” (ibid., 466). The emphasis here is on the indwelling of the Spirit, not just the relationality of human beings, which distinguishes the church’s ability to echo the triune *perichoresis*. The Spirit enables and establishes the unity and particularity of the church.

a whole are, through the work of the Spirit, “in some way prominent among those created beings who are enabled to share in the perfecting.”<sup>28</sup> God has chosen and elected the Church – through no merit of its own – to be the central place in this broken creation where his will for a reconciled creation is anticipated.

Gunton emphasizes that “perfection comes only by salvation, and that means that things become what they are only by being brought back into right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup> This qualification is important because it does not permit “perfection,” “sacrifice of praise,” or the movement of the Spirit to become disassociated from what God has done in Christ Jesus to overcome human sin and estrangement. The Spirit works to reorient human life in the world by drawing individuals into a community ordered to the moment “where the reconciliation takes place in time, that is to say, to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet Gunton wants to privilege the ongoing recreation of the church by the Spirit in the present over Jesus’s historical institution of the church in the past.<sup>31</sup> Gunton does not regard the institution by Jesus as unimportant. Rather, he stresses that the more significant reality for the church’s life is its daily dependence on the grace of the Spirit to

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<sup>28</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 90.

<sup>30</sup> Gunton, “The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community,” in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 62. David Höhne notes a logical link here between Gunton’s doctrine of creation and his ecclesiology: “The world in its contingency is entirely dependent upon the actions of God to sustain it; and these are mediated through the transcendent Spirit. The implication that follows is that the church cannot be anything other than contingent and finite lest it be something more than created” (David A. Höhne, *Spirit and Sonship: Colin Gunton's Theology of Particularity and the Holy Spirit* (Farnham, U.K.; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010), 155). Thus, for Gunton, the church is ever dependent upon the grace and action of the Spirit to constitute its community as the Body of Christ.

be conformed to Christ. This grace grafts the church into the body of Christ and forms it into his likeness. Gunton explains,

The Spirit's work is to make real, from time to time and as divine gift gives rise to human freedom, anticipations of the true community of the last days. In this regard, the church's mistake is too often to claim that these conditions are too directly and by her own inner strength realized in her life and institutions, rather than being anticipated in them only by the gracious and free action of the Lord the Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Perfection is not a static historical reality, but remains dynamic and occasional, dependent upon the grace and gift of the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> The church does not become perfect or

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<sup>32</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 122.

<sup>33</sup> John E. Colwell is concerned with what he terms Gunton's "ecclesiological occasionalism" (John E. Colwell, "Provisionality and Promise: Avoiding Ecclesiastical Nestorianism?," in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 107). As he notes, Gunton emphasizes that church communities exhibit and witness to the eschatological perfection of Christ's reconciliation of humanity to God "from time to time." And again, "The church is called to be that midpoint, the realisation in time of the universal redemption and the place where the reconciliation of all things is *from time to time* anticipated" (Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 170; cited in Colwell, "Provisionality and Promise," 101; emphasis Colwell's).

This occasionalist qualification is prominent in Gunton's work and calls attention to the church's finite and contingent nature. The church becomes an echo of God's life not under its own power but through the power and work of the Spirit. This occasionalism is problematic for Colwell. Though he acknowledges Gunton's concern with those who make the church an extension of the incarnation or the Spirit a possession of the church, he wonders whether this occasionalism renders the Spirit's presence in the church, and therefore Christ's presence, uncertain and capricious (*ibid.*, 106).

Colwell would like to emphasize that the freedom of the Spirit to act and make Christ present in the church is "bounded by *promise*" (*ibid.*, 105). This makes Gunton's ecclesiological occasionalism "unnecessary and avoidable" (*ibid.*, 109). "For Aquinas, as for the Reformers, the sacraments are *res promissa*, 'the stuff of promise,'" and Colwell believes that "divine promise can be the basis of a humble assurance of faith without succumbing to presumption and manipulation" (*ibid.*, 110). A Spirit-mediated presence of Christ is a "*promised presence*" that humans can trust (*ibid.*).

However, I would like to note that Gunton's occasionalist emphasis falls on the *church*, not on the presence of the Spirit or Christ. The church becomes the community it is called to be by Christ in the Spirit only from time to time through non-competitive

participate in the ongoing particularization of creation apart from the Spirit, who reconstitutes the present by allowing the future to be anticipated in the here and now.

#### **2.2.4 Summary**

In light of the Spirit's mission to sustain creation towards eschatological perfection, humans are enabled and invited to participate in the Spirit's perfecting work by the mediation of the Spirit. Always dependent on the Spirit, human participation in the project of creation takes the form of liberating and particularizing creatures to be what they were created to be, a "sacrifice of praise" to God. Created or finite perfection consists in the ability to praise God within the context of the fallen world, witnessing to and anticipating toward the perfection of the age to come. As a locus of the Spirit's liberating perfection, local church communities can potentially become finite echoes both of the relational perfection of the trinity and sites in the world of God's re-creative power to reconcile all things in Christ. The community concretely exhibits this status when it empowers freedom-in-community, a space for the particularity of persons and non-human creatures to flourish.

Yet, what does a "sacrifice of praise" that participates in the Spirit's perfection of creation look like? We will now consider – in reverse order – Gunton's key themes of mediation, relationality, and particularity as they apply to the human vocation of offering a "sacrifice of praise" as a means of participating in creation's perfection.

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cooperation. This seems to me a realistic reading of the sinfully fallen particularity of concrete churches – as we witness daily, church communities do not often live into the fullness of resurrected reality even if we believe and trust that the Spirit and Christ are present through promise. Gunton's ecclesiological occasionalism, in this sense, attends to the concrete particularity of fallen creatureliness.

## 2.3 *Created Particularity: Accepting and Gifting Freedom*

### 2.3.1 Freedom to Be Myself In Relation

The concept of created or finite perfection is also closely linked with the freedom-to-be-a-particular-in-relation. If perfection is praise, and perfection is achieved in particularity, then both the Spirit and human individualizing and particularizing actions encourage, if not the praise itself, the state of freedom in which a person is enabled to offer her life as a sacrifice of praise.

As discussed in chapter one, Gunton defines particularity as “a vast range of ways of being and of being in relationship,” with the particularizing relationships of the triune persons serving as the model.<sup>34</sup> Here, Gunton’s emphasis on particularity serves to highlight that humans were created to be *humans*, particular humans; they were not created to be God or any other type of creature.<sup>35</sup> The Spirit makes this particularity, this difference from God and from other creatures, possible and conforms humans to the image of Christ. Yet, this emphasis on particularity also highlights the continuity between humans and non-human creatures amid the stronger *discontinuity* between humans and God. This sense of continuity between human particulars and other created particulars forms the basis for Gunton’s understanding of culture and ethics, to be discussed below.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17. Do note, however, that Gunton never gives any specific examples of concrete human particularities – race, class, gender, (dis)abilities, etc. – that are to be affirmed or upheld within particularizing relationships modeled after the triune persons. We will go on to address this deficiency in the second part of this dissertation with our focus on Wendell Berry’s Sabbath poetry.

<sup>35</sup> Whitney, 122.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Linking the idea of “sacrifice of praise” to the perfecting and particularizing ministry of the Spirit, we can reason that if particularity is both having personal integrity and being located within webs of relationships that shape and uphold personal integrity, then the vocation of offering a sacrifice of praise is, at the very least, to act in ways that enable the particularity of others to flourish and, in so doing, praise God.

To offer a sacrifice of praise *is* to participate in the Spirit’s perfecting and particularizing work in creation. The perfecting ministry of the Spirit gives *direction* to creation’s beings while maintaining their individual particularity. That is, it orients humans toward relations that offer a sacrifice of praise to God.<sup>37</sup> The Spirit frees sinful humans, “liberating them to be themselves and empowering anticipations of the eschatological reconciliation of all things.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the character of the Spirit’s perfecting work in creation is the paradigm for what it means for humans to offer a sacrifice of praise through instances of particularizing the created order. Through the eschatological work of the Spirit, the multifarious particulars of creation “can come to be that which they are particularly called to be,” which is an instance of praise to God.<sup>39</sup>

Particularity, and so too a life dedicated to offering a sacrifice of praise, then, is “the matter of enabling the things and people of which our world consists, each in their own way, to serve as *vehicles* of the praise of God.”<sup>40</sup> Yet the form of life to be considered a “sacrifice of praise” cannot be understood without reference to the *particular* form that

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<sup>37</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 205.

<sup>38</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 162.

<sup>39</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

redemption takes. Gunton makes a parallel claim for the humanity of the Son and the integrity of the creation. The Spirit is the particularizer of both. Just as the Spirit enables the Son to be the only “truly human” person by enabling Jesus’ actions of obedience to the Father to be acts of *human* obedience, so it is with us. The Spirit liberates and “enables people to be constituted as *particular* persons in free and social relationships.”<sup>41</sup> The Spirit also offers creation “space” to be itself in its created integrity. Harkening back to Gunton’s concern for the trinitarian *hypostases*, the “personal space” that each trinitarian person offers the other two to be themselves, to be a personal particular, is the dynamic root of all being that also makes space for the creation to be itself.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, Gunton concludes, “Wherever there is between human beings the kind of love instantiated in Jesus and wherever there is good use of the created world for science and art; wherever, that is to say, the world in all its aspects is enabled to praise its creator, there is the work of the perfecting Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> It is not a subjective “sacrifice of praise” – the “sacrifice” is not just what *we* determine it to be – but a sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. The form of life to which humans are called is intelligible only within the triune economy of salvation. Gunton writes, “In so far as human beings are enabled by the Spirit to be obedient to the Father who gave his Son for

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<sup>41</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “The Spirit as Lord: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom,” in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, ed. Andrew Walker (London, U.K.: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 181–82. Emphasis in original.

<sup>42</sup> See also, Paul Cumin, “The Taste of Cake: Relation and Otherness with Colin Gunton and the Strong Second Hand of God,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 72–73.

<sup>43</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 41. Though, as Whitney reminds us, “Of course, the *role* that Christ has in the redeeming of creation was different from the *role* that normal humans have, but *it is still the work of the Spirit that enables humans to carry out their distinct and particular roles in shaping the creation*” (Whitney, 170; emphasis in original).

the salvation of the world, they become and achieve that which they are called to be and do.”<sup>44</sup> Thus the human vocation is to cooperate with the triune God, who enables human agency to fulfill his will. In order to do this, God himself overcomes sin and reorients human action in the world by becoming the one true human in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

For Gunton, only relations characterized by grace enable both personal particularity and personal freedom. Grace, however, is not a “substance” that is bestowed by God. It is God’s characteristic actions toward the creation. Grace *is* God in action. God acts graciously through his Son and Spirit to mediate freedom to the human creature.<sup>45</sup> Freedom comes only through relationship; it is a mediated gift, not an innate capacity. Yet sin prevents humans from acting freely.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, only Christ by the Spirit enables the freedom necessary for persons to “be or become themselves.”

Thus, the primary relation that establishes this freedom is the God-creature relationship, mediated by the Son and the Spirit, the Father’s “two hands.”<sup>47</sup> The Son’s atoning actions establish the conditions of freedom and the Spirit acts to draw individuals into that freedom and toward their eschatological perfection. Without God’s gracious

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<sup>44</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 175.

<sup>45</sup> “Grace is not something reserved for sinners, we might say, but the fundamental form of God’s relation to the creature” (Colin E. Gunton, “God, Grace and Freedom,” in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1995), 126).

<sup>46</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation, Didsbury Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, U.K.: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 55.

<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere Gunton explains, “By the Grace of God is meant the gracious action towards the creature of God the Father, mediated by the Spirit through the Son. Put otherwise, we can say that by relating human beings to the Father through the Son, the Spirit is the one who graciously liberates people and things to be themselves” (Gunton, “God, Grace and Freedom,” in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, 128).

actions – in atonement and subsequent sanctification – “human freedom must be understood to be at best curtailed, at worst virtually ineffective.”<sup>48</sup> Once more, Gunton reminds us that even finite perfection, in a fallen world, requires salvation.

Accordingly, freedom “should be conceived in terms of, as a function of, personal particularity.”<sup>49</sup> Gunton presents two correlative theses to explain the relationship between freedom and particularity. First, “Freedom is that which I do with my own particularity, that which enables me to be and do what is truly and distinctively myself.”<sup>50</sup> Second, “Freedom is that which others do to and with my particular being, in enabling me to be and do, or preventing me from being and doing, that which is particularly myself.”<sup>51</sup> Though these statements might seem to stand in tension, the second serves to nuance the meaning of the first. To claim that “freedom is what I do with my own particularity” is to claim that freedom is freedom only when I am able to realize my unique particularity as a person, when I am able to realize and live out my particularity. Furthermore, to claim that “freedom is that which others do to and with my particular being” is to recognize that freedom is always mediated by others. Freedom is always freedom-in-relation-to some other human being, social structure, or place because “our freedom is what we each make of our own particularity, and none of us are truly the particular persons we are created to be except in love and fellowship with our

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

neighbor.”<sup>52</sup> My freedom always depends upon the actions of others within the complex web of relations in which I am imbedded.<sup>53</sup>

These theses are somewhat circular because even though freedom is something I may or may not exercise as a particular person, my particularity is given to me, mediated to me by those with whom I am in relation.<sup>54</sup> I must have freedom-in-relation to realize my own personal particularity, yet within relationships of freedom I have the agency to exercise my freedom to realize my particularity and the particularity of others.

Yet freedom through Christ in the Spirit “is not a shapeless freedom.... Just as sin takes shape, as the opening chapters of Genesis show, in a range of personal and social dislocations, so salvation takes shape in a matrix of new and reconciled patterns of relations.”<sup>55</sup> Gunton’s understanding of freedom, grace, and particularity are tightly tied to the economic actions of the Son and the Spirit, particularly their establishing of the community of the reconciled, Christ’s church. Freedom is thus freedom from sin and bondage for life in Christ’s reconciled Body. This is the freedom to give the other space for particularization and perfection, to become what God intends them to be – yet always in the historical context of the community. Community, particularity, perfection, gracious actions – these all have a normative context, a normative thrust for Gunton. This is not a vision of freedom from everything to be whoever I want to be, but freedom in the Spirit

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<sup>52</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> Gunton, “God, Grace and Freedom,” in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, 122.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

through the Son to be give space and freedom for others, to be in reconciled human relationships and relationships of respect and faithfulness to the non-human creation.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.3.2 The Church as a Community that Enables Particularity**

The Spirit may gift the church with a form of finite perfection that is both dynamic and local.<sup>57</sup> There is, for Gunton, no “church community” in the abstract, only particular communities in particular locations. As the one who maintains unity-in-diversity, the Spirit works within particular contexts to realize instances of perfection and praise. Gunton emphasizes that there is no salvation “that does not take shape in concrete patterns of community,”<sup>58</sup> and that a function of the work of the Spirit is to “realize in the life of particular human beings and groups of human beings the reality of what God in Christ achieved on the cross.”<sup>59</sup> For Gunton, finite perfection – free lives of praise and thanksgiving – occur within the communal and social patterns of the church.

Significantly, Gunton does not understand the church to exhaust the ways in which the eschatological perfection of creation is embodied. The church on earth “is

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<sup>56</sup> Yet, according to David Höhne, “to leave the Spirit’s perfecting work to the creation of freedom shows little consideration for some of the harsher realities of penultimate life. The myriad of complexities involved in personal interaction to say nothing of the confounding effects of sin make Gunton’s proposal inadequate” (Höhne, 133). This would be a concern if Gunton did not have such a rich and multifaceted vision for the Spirit’s actions to perfect the created order, as shown in chapter one. Limiting Gunton’s construal of the Spirit’s perfecting to merely the creation of freedom is to disregard this.

<sup>57</sup> Yet nowhere does Gunton give specific, concrete, or detailed examples of local church perfection beyond the administration of eucharist.

<sup>58</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “One Mediator ... The Man Jesus Christ: Reconciliation, Mediation and Life in Community,” *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 2 (2002): 157.

<sup>59</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 121. Also, in Gunton, justification “is the beginning of a movement into a new series of relations that will define personhood. This decisive action occurs in the social realm of the church through baptism” (Whitney, 106).

elected as the *particular* means by which *particular* anticipations of the promised reconciliations of all things in Christ are achieved.”<sup>60</sup> He is clear that the Spirit is free to empower non-Christians and non-Christian communities to anticipate the reconciliation of creation. Yet the Church is where these anticipations take concentrated form – in proclamation and sacramental administration – as individuals are initiated into the body of Christ and live with one another in concrete communities of relation. Local congregations are the means by which the Spirit works to reconcile particular persons and non-human creatures in Christ.

Because particularity, for Gunton, consists in the multiplicity of ways that persons and non-human creatures exist in interdependent relationships, it is always “realized in community.”<sup>61</sup> The calling of the church to praise and thanksgiving, to perfection, then is also a call to cultivate mutually-particularizing relationships. To engage creation by offering one’s work and cultural products as a “sacrifice of praise” is to enable the particularity of others to flourish. Called to be sites that anticipate eschatological perfection, church communities are to model relations on the liberating actions of the Spirit in Jesus’s life, wherein the Spirit liberates Jesus to be what he was called to be. This model of human liberation “enables people to be constituted as *particular* persons in free and social relationships.... The church is there to embody the kind of freedom in

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<sup>60</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 40. Emphasis in original.

<sup>61</sup> Gunton, “God, Grace and Freedom,” in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, 132.

community which is God's will for human life everywhere."<sup>62</sup> Although Gunton does not use this term, the church is to be a *microcosm* of liberated, free, and perfected creation.

"To be a person" in the relational sense that Gunton has developed in light of the triune persons "is to be constituted in particularity and freedom – to be given space to be – by others in the community."<sup>63</sup> Since freedom is mediated by others in relation, a person can be free to live into their vocation only when they have been given the space and freedom to realize their own particularity.<sup>64</sup> Yet space and freedom are not shapeless: "freedom...consists in the constitution of, or liberation to, patterns of relationality in which one's true being is realized."<sup>65</sup> In the social matrix of the church, a Christian is freed for a life of worship and praise, of imaging the relational patterns of the trinity, of conformity by the power of the Spirit to the Body of Christ. And to be in the Body of Christ is to be in mutually-particularizing relationships within concrete local communities of fellow Christians.

If grace is not a substance bestowed by God but instead a characteristic of God's actions-in-relations, then human persons can also participate in giving grace and freedom to others. Gunton concludes, "Grace is therefore something that marks liberating human

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<sup>62</sup> Gunton, "The Spirit as Lord: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom," in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, 181–2.

<sup>63</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei," in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Christoph Schwobel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1991), 59.

<sup>64</sup> Recall Gunton's two theses about freedom discussed above: (1) "Freedom is that which I do with my own particularity, that which enables me to be and do what is truly and distinctively myself," and (2) "Freedom is that which others do to and with my particular being, in enabling me to be and do, or preventing me from being and doing, that which is particularly myself" (Gunton, "God, Grace and Freedom," in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, 122).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

action also, for it is a form of action in which others are enabled to be themselves.”<sup>66</sup> Also, the action of “becoming themselves” is always within a particular, grounded context. He writes, “To say that moral agents are enabled by grace freely to do something is to say that they are enabled by the Spirit’s action to do that which is the particular form of action appropriate to them in the present,” which is offer a “sacrifice of praise.”<sup>67</sup>

### **2.3.3 Summary**

Human participation in the Spirit’s perfecting work in creation – our “sacrifice of praise” – is to image the Spirit’s perfecting of Jesus Christ such that our lives encourage the freedom-in-relation that Christ’s life and work exhibits. As we are conformed by the Spirit into the image of the Son, we are freed to act in ways that enable the particularity of others to flourish and, in doing so, praise God. Freedom to become what one was created to be is always offered within the context of relation. The church on earth is one place where particular manifestations of reconciliation and perfection are embodied, especially in proclamation and sacramental administration. The church is to be a concrete community that makes space for particularity-in-relation and life as a “sacrifice of praise” to flourish.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 132. And the freedom to act for the particularity of others is not limited to “saving” or “liberating” actions. As David Höhne notes, “in Gunton’s description one acts for another’s freedom whether or not they need saving from something. Put differently, Gunton’s description includes the possibility for the giving of freedom to others to include the spheres of the True and the Beautiful as well as the Good” (Höhne, 132). To enable others to “become themselves” includes enabling them to cultivate a range of skills, passions, and vocations – including art, architecture, and culture-making.

<sup>67</sup> Gunton, “God, Grace and Freedom,” in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, 130.

## 2.4 *Created Relationality: Image of God*

### 2.4.1 **Humans as the Image of God**

Gunton also deploys the often-fraught term “image of God” in order to understand the human vocation as a “sacrifice of praise.” Unlike many theologians, however, the status of humans as “image” here is primarily about humans having a unique type of *relation* with God, not about any sort of human capacity such as reason or the will.<sup>68</sup> This relation to God also reflects a responsibility to be in a unique kind of relation with God’s creation, i.e., dominion. The image is the mode of our personal being before God and in the created order that is worked out in relation to non-human creation in the form of dominion. We will explore the nuances of Gunton’s understanding of dominion in the final section.

To be a person, in the truest sense of the word, is fulfilled only eschatologically, but actualized now by the action of the Spirit.<sup>69</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, God is three hypostatic persons-in-relation who are particularized by the power of the Spirit. To be in the image of God is to image this perichoretic relationality, and so learn to be a particular-in-relation with God and other human persons.<sup>70</sup> It is to both give and receive

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<sup>68</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 3. See also Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, *Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 207.

<sup>69</sup> “It would seem to follow, then, that, as created, the image of God is in a sense something given, even though it can finally be perfected only eschatologically and through redemption. That something given cannot be taken away, except by God, because it is part of what it is to be a created human being” (Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 204).

<sup>70</sup> Anizor notes that Gunton’s identification of the image of God with relationships does not rule out other perspectives and may in fact overwhelm Gunton’s interpretation of the scriptures. For example, identifying the image that we mirror as being-in-relation

particularity. Gunton notes, “Likeness to God consists in the fact that human beings are persons, while the remainder of the created world is not.”<sup>71</sup> To truly image God requires both perfection and liberation. Humans do not perfectly give and receive particularity from other humans in this age. Even so, humans are empowered by the Spirit to live into the calling to be a person, to image the perichoretic persons of God by being conformed to Christ in the Spirit.

This personal-relational image of God is also concretely embodied. Not limited to some spiritual or noetic realm, Gunton is emphatic, the image of God includes the material aspects of human being. Being in the image of God is “‘structural’ in the respect that it is an intrinsic part of human createdness.”<sup>72</sup> Gunton further notes that human beings are a “spiritual-material unity, a psychophysical person whose created reality depends at every turn on being upheld and empowered by the Spirit of God.”<sup>73</sup> Only after acknowledging this spiritual-material unity does Gunton feel free to engage the language of the image of God.

Although, due to the Fall, humans exist in an estranged and broken relation with God and other persons, God’s commitment to the creation means that the image-relation continues. As God upholds the relationship, no human action, belief, disposition, or personal situation can break it, though the relationship can be seriously distorted. Thus, “Even those moving in the wrong direction are upheld by the Son and drawn to their

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could appear arbitrary. Anizor rhetorically substitutes God’s “being-in-act” to good effect (Anizor, 78).

<sup>71</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 208. Recall that for Gunton, God is spirit, humans have spirit, and animals neither are spirit nor have spirit.

<sup>72</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 41.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

perfection by the Spirit, even if in their recalcitrance they seek to escape the hands of God.”<sup>74</sup> It follows, on this account, that even warped individuals are persons.<sup>75</sup> They exist in relation to other persons and creatures, even if these mutual relations are destructive their own or of others’ personal integrity. The economic mission of the Spirit is to restore the true character of the image, the image of Jesus Christ.

Gunton writes, “To be in the image of God is to subsist in relations of mutual constitutiveness with other human beings” and “with the non-personal creation.”<sup>76</sup> This construal of the image of God is dynamic. Since to be in the image of God is to be a person-in-relation, Gunton rejects any individualistic way of construing the image. The image reveals our link with other human persons. This construal of the image requires others: “To be in the image of God is therefore to be in necessary relation to others so made.”<sup>77</sup> Humans can live into their calling to be a person only by existing in mutually constitutive relations with others. Or, to state it another way, to be part of an interdependent community of persons and non-human creatures, each of whom bestows

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<sup>74</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 207.

<sup>75</sup> Paraskevè Tibbs asks “if human beings were created in order to develop mutually constitutive relations with other human beings...does failure to do so affect the image?” According to Gunton’s work Tibbs answers no: “failure to do so affects genuine personhood, but not the image. We are less Christ-like, and therefore less in the image, but the image is ultimately indelible” since it is upheld by God himself (Tibbs, “Created for Action” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 123).

Gunton does not distinguish between “image” and “likeness,” taking them as synonyms. It might actually be supportive of his cause to distinguish them, with “image” as the relationship established by God and unbreakable by human action. “Likeness” then can describe human resemblance to the image, with the Spirit perfecting human persons’ likeness to physically enact the relationship with God instantiated in the image.

<sup>76</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 208.

freedom and particularity on the others.<sup>78</sup> This shows how central perichoretic relationality is to what it means to be a human in the image of God.<sup>79</sup>

Gunton notes that in the New Testament, the language of image of God is centered on Jesus Christ as the true Image of God. If the image is about the character of relation, then a Christian understanding of the type of relationships that persons should be pursue is shaped by the ministry of reconciliation to which God has revealed by the Spirit through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. By taking a body in time and space, Jesus became the place for Christians to discover what a person particularized by the Spirit and offering one's life as a "sacrifice of praise" looks like.

Christ is the true image of God because he has the perfected relationship with the Father by the Spirit. He is the priest who offers himself as the perfect sacrifice. The image of God is a mode of being – life as a "sacrifice of praise" – where body, mind, and spirit work together as one. The image is our whole being, not some constitutive part of it. The image may be marred by sin, but God has shown his commitment to those made in his image through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.<sup>80</sup> To live into the image of God, to become a "person-in-perichoetic-relation," is part of what it means

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<sup>78</sup> "To be is not to be an individual; it is not to be isolated from others, cut off from them by the body that is a tomb, but in some way to be bound up with one another in relationship. Being a person is about being from and for and with the other. I need you – and particularly those of you who are nearest to me – in order to be myself. That is the first thing to say: persons are beings who exist only in relation – in relation to God, to others and to the world from which they come" (Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 14).

<sup>79</sup> "The logic of sociality as gift and reception, however, shows that the other is central for our being. What we receive from and give to others is constitutive: not self-fulfilment but relation to the other as other is the key to human being, universally" (Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 227).

<sup>80</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 207.

to offer a “sacrifice of praise” to God. Humans in the image of God are a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to the Father, through imaging the Son, by the power of the perfecting and particularizing Holy Spirit.

#### **2.4.2 The Church as a School to Those in the Image of God**

As the community in which personal particularity is given and received, the church is a place to learn how to be in free and empowering relationships. Gunton variously calls the church “a schooling in the ways of the eschatological kingdom,”<sup>81</sup> “a school of personal being,”<sup>82</sup> and a place where Christians learn “the art of living.”<sup>83</sup> Although he does not make the specific connection, to learn the “art of living” and the “ways of the eschatological kingdom” would be to learn to act in the image of God, since this is what humans were created to be and eschatologically will be. Thus, by the Spirit Christians learn to be the image of God in community.

The church is where Gunton locates the beginning of personal re-formation in the image of God, “not because the church is immune from contamination by the network of dissolution, but because the church is the community placed by Word and sacrament under the rule of Christ and therefore in saving relation to God the creator and redeemer.”<sup>84</sup> Again, the emphasis is on God’s ongoing work. Here the gospel is preached, sacraments administered, sins confessed, and petitions made. The Spirit, by drawing persons into concrete interpersonal relations and practices in the local church, enables our faltering acts of praise and thanksgiving to both honor the Creator and to shape

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<sup>81</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 40–41.

<sup>82</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 17.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>84</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 108.

modes of being in the world. The church is part of perfecting the project of creation, where Christians learn the concrete shape of persons-in-relation through ecclesial practices.

Although recognizing the persistent stain of sin, Gunton desires the church to be perceived as a locus of real and concrete ethical change. He writes, “we can no longer be content with the *simul justus et peccator*, for the presence of Christ through the Spirit must be conceived as the sphere in which sin begins to be outgrown in fact as well as in principle.”<sup>85</sup> By the gracious perfecting and particularizing actions of the Spirit, the community cooperates in becoming an embodied anticipation and witness to the perfection of the entire created order.

Yet, again, Gunton does not assume that this is merely a function of communities working hard. He recognizes that, due to sin, the Spirit always works in contexts that resist the Spirit’s perfecting mission. In a critique of virtue ethics, he emphasizes that any true renewal of human character only occurs through God’s actions in Christ.<sup>86</sup> Justification must precede sanctification; God’s grace – that is, the Spirit in action – must come first. He argues, “There has to be a reforming before there can be a forming.”<sup>87</sup> Only then can human virtues, as “settled dispositions to ‘good works’,” become anticipations of perfection.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972–1995* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 1996), 219.

<sup>86</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Intellect and Action: Elucidations on Christian Theology and the Life of Faith* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T & T Clark, 2000), 112.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

The emphasis on the preeminence of justification is critical because Gunton recognizes the thoroughgoingness of sin, both social and personal. He writes, “Because under the conditions of fallenness that dynamic [social and material context] is at once progressive and regressive, ecclesial formation exists to reorientate us to the eschatological promise of perfection in Christ; but it does so in a context which continues to resist it – hence ‘at once justified and a sinner.’”<sup>89</sup> Gunton cautions against thinking that whatever the church is doing, it is the Spirit’s doing. Material and social life is captive to sin and only when it is liberated by the actions of the Spirit will it give praise and thanksgiving to God. The Spirit uses the church community to reorient sinful creatures such that they, together, learn to give a sacrifice of praise to God.

### **2.4.3 Summary**

In light of the perichoretic triune being, created relationality for humans comes in the form of the image of God. For Gunton, “image of God” refers explicitly to a form of relation with God, that of praise and thanksgiving, and a form of relation with God’s creation, dominion. It is not a reference to human capacities, but is instead of mode of being before God. Due to the Fall, the image is a relation upheld and established by God, not by humans. Humans can distort or reject the image, but the image-relation cannot be completely broken. Restoring to humans the true character of the image – as revealed in Christ, whose whole life was a sacrifice of praise – is part of the perfecting mission of the Spirit. Gunton’s construal of the image as a form of relation immediately reveals the necessary relation with other persons; the image requires existing in mutually particularizing relations with others, humans and non-humans alike. As a locus of the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 112.

Spirit's reconciling and perfecting work, the church can become a place where Christians learn to give and receive the freedom to become particular, and to therefore actualize the image of God in community.

## **2.5 Created Mediation: Dominion and Human Culture-Making**

### **2.5.1 Dominion**

In relation to the category of created mediation, Gunton uses “dominion” to describe the human calling in creation to offer a “sacrifice of praise” in relation to the rest of material creation. Addressed to persons in the image of God, “The human calling is to enable the whole creation to praise its creator by particular acts of faithful action towards both other people and the world: by proper *relationality* and by loving *dominion*.”<sup>90</sup> It is through faithful action-in-relation that the image, a “sacrifice of praise,” shines forth. Not only do human beings have a responsibility to exhibit proper relationality – the giving of freedom and particularity and thus the ability to praise God – to other humans, they are also to extend this proper relationality to the non-human creation through a relationship of dominion.

Both of these dimensions of relationality were disrupted by the Fall and are being eschatologically restored in Christ. Gunton acknowledges, “The Fall involves a loss of that dominion over creation which is one dimension of the human calling.”<sup>91</sup> The dominion to which humans are called in a fallen world is one restored and enabled by Christ in Spirit. He writes, “It is possible, and, I believe right, to interpret the kingly and

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<sup>90</sup> Gunton, “Atonement and the Project of Creation: An Interpretation of Colossians 1:15–23,” 41. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 19.

prophetic work of Christ, in teaching and miracle alike, in terms of a reestablishing and perfecting of the dominion given to the first human creatures.”<sup>92</sup> The Spirit particularizes Christ to be a representative sample of the created order in perfect relation to God the Father, and therefore Christ restores the possibility of recovering the human calling to have dominion by the grace of that same Spirit.

Gunton notes that the setting of Genesis 2–3 is a garden, not a paradise. This subtle difference was significant to him since, “in paradise, the fruits simply fall off the trees and on to our tables; in a garden, trees have to be tended.”<sup>93</sup> Even before the Fall, then, there was work to be done in the garden to make it habitable for human beings – naming, tending, and subduing. Since creation was always intended to be a project perfected with human participation, it is open to human engagement. Humans, however, are merely stewards or ministers by the Spirit, not “absolute lords.”<sup>94</sup> The created order was created with its own integrity and particularity, and it offers its own praise through

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 197.

<sup>94</sup> Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei,” in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, 61.

Though according to Tibbs, Gunton’s opinions were not settled when it came to the ontological importance of the garden narrative. For example, in 1991 she notes that Gunton called the stewardship of creation “too literalistic and too restricted,” then in 1993 revised his opinion by writing that “being in the image of God has something to do with the human responsibility to offer the creation, perfected, back to its creator as a perfect sacrifice of praise” (Tibbs, “Created for Action” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 121).

Tibbs reexamines the garden narrative through the lens of liturgical theology in order to discover a bit more about humanity’s ontological function in the garden (ibid., 124) She draws on the terminology of “priest” in addition to “steward.” According to Tibbs, following Alexander Schmemmann, the garden was given to Adam for both sustenance and communion with God. Adam rejected the offered communion with God through his disobedience and sought creation as an end in itself: He failed to be a priest of creation.

becoming what it was created to be. Any recovery of the calling to have dominion will respect and recognize this fact.

Creation requires human engagement to become what it was created to be. God offers creation to those made in his image for positive and respectful cultural transformation to support human habitation and flourishing. Culture is a mediating factor between humans and creation. Creative engagement with material creation enables humans to learn about the order, structure, and limit of the material world and in doing so, learn something about what it means to be human. He writes, “Through our agricultural, technical and artistic interactions with the world we come in part to know who we are.”<sup>95</sup> The structures of creation are rational and intelligible, revealing themselves to those who attend to created particulars.

Dominion reveals an asymmetry of relation between human and non-human creation. Although all human and non-human creatures are all equally part of created reality, humans exist in a unique relation to God. Humans, as a result of being persons, image him while creation merely reflects his glory. For Gunton, the goal of the divine instruction to “have dominion” is for humans to cultivate relations with non-human creatures that offer praise to God. Dominion, therefore, has little to nothing to do with dominating or controlling the natural creation. Instead, he defines dominion, again, in relation to the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise to God. Dominion describes the asymmetrical relationship between humans and the non-human creation and the intended result of the relationship is that humans, as priests of creation, offer a sacrifice of

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<sup>95</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 73.

praise with, through, and on behalf of the non-human creation; doing so involves offering praise to God by enabling other creatures to praise as well.

The instruction to “have dominion” makes sense in Gunton’s line of reasoning only if it is understood as a mandate to make something of creation, a mandate realized only in Christ and through the Spirit.<sup>96</sup> Again, to have dominion is to have “a responsibility under God for the proper perfecting of created things.”<sup>97</sup> To have dominion, then, is to give and receive particularity from and freedom to non-human creatures.

As an offering of a life of praise, dominion is eschatologically oriented action in the present that anticipates the perfection of creation. As a project, creation is both perfect and not yet complete. In Genesis 1:28, what Gunton refers to as the “cultural mandate” – “the divine command to make something of the world”<sup>98</sup> – he sees the evidence that creation is not all that it is intended to be and that there is still something that must be done. The command “involves at least the overcoming of a measure of continuing disorder or at least absence of what we can call eschatological order and freedom.”<sup>99</sup> The cultural mandate names the responsibility to participate in the perfection of, by the power of the Spirit, creation’s order through human life in the world.<sup>100</sup> For Gunton, the paradigmatic example of humans anticipating the eschatological perfection

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<sup>96</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” 201–2.

<sup>99</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 192.

<sup>100</sup> Whitney critiques Gunton for failing “to note that there is little Scriptural evidence for what redemption means for the *non-human* creation in the present” (Whitney, 104).

through loving relationship with the created world, as mentioned above, is in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is because it is an action that involves the coming together of the material world and persons-in-relation, directed to praising God.<sup>101</sup>

Dominion, for Gunton, is an ethic of transformation and not submission or domination.<sup>102</sup> It is centrally concerned with engaging creation in such a way as to offer it freely to God in thanksgiving, "a giving in praise of that which was given to be used for the praise of God."<sup>103</sup> It is "creative subordination" of oneself to other persons and non-human creatures in order to image Christ's life and manner of being with others.<sup>104</sup> Enacting this vision of dominion will involve "a carrying of the cross and the experience of toilsome and often unrewarding labour – of what we call failure."<sup>105</sup> But if the key to being human is to image trinitarian relationality and live into the sacrifice of praise that humans are called to be, then the human action of dominion is a dynamic of both gift and reception that is analogous to the self-giving of Jesus Christ, by the Spirit.

### **2.5.2 Dominion as Culture-Making**

In Gunton's writings, dominion is also one way to talk about human cultural production. He writes, "Culture, we might say, is that set of activities in which those

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<sup>101</sup> Gunton finds assistance in the "doctrine of the Image of God, Christologically conceived, where it is conceived not to consist in reason but in a dignity and calling to be a person.... The cultural mandate involves two foci, human beings in relation to one another and in involvement in the material world in all its variety. They come together, above all, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper" (Gunton, "Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture," in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 92).

<sup>102</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 226.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

made in the image of God share in the divine perfecting of that which was made in the beginning.”<sup>106</sup> The Spirit works through human cultures to both perfect human persons and enabled human persons to participate in the Spirit’s perfecting of creation.<sup>107</sup> Persons, though, are only “subcreators” or “ministers of creation.” Culture places humans into relation with non-human creatures that potentially give persons the space to “come in part to know who we are.”<sup>108</sup>

Gunton construes the term “culture” broadly: “Culture is all those things which human beings make of the created order, what we call the material created order, including those only apparently non-material dimensions like words and music.”<sup>109</sup> Agriculture, building, art, craft, cooking, language, and commerce, for example, are all considered culture-creating activities. He does not distinguish between so-called “high culture” or “folk culture.” All humans do to interact with the created order is considered culture in his account, and has the potential to reveal, add to, recover, or destroy the beauty of material creation. Culture, aesthetics, and material creation are all part of the creative human process of engaging, and therefore potentially perfecting, the created order.<sup>110</sup> Engagement with the material world is an intrinsic and necessary part of what it

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<sup>106</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” 203.

<sup>108</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 79. See also, “As nature is that which comes from the hand of the Creator, so culture is all the things that human beings do to, with, and in that created world” (Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” 200).

<sup>110</sup> Whitney, 163.

means to be a human being. Thus human culture-making is highly significant for how we actualize ourselves as persons in relation to God and one another.<sup>111</sup>

This is not to say that Gunton ignores the prevalence of human sin, especially as it (de)forms culture.<sup>112</sup> Because of the destructive power of sin, humans need the liberating

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>112</sup> Some critiques of Gunton's work argue that his focus on eschatological perfection leaves him ill equip to give an account of evil and sin. Whitney comments, "the primary difficulty is that [Gunton's] description of evil gives little insight into how one should understand the interplay between the goodness of creation and sin" (ibid., 137). See also the critiques of Gunton in Bradley G. Green, "Colin Gunton and the Theological Origin of Modernity," in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010); and Maurice Wiles, review of *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, by Colin E. Gunton, *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 37, no. 1 (March 2002): 220–22.

Gunton, for his part, focuses on the corporate and structural realities of sin in an already fallen world instead of individual or personal sin, admittedly without ever giving an extensive description of the Fall and sin. Whitney notes that *The Christian Faith* has a mere four pages on sin and *The Triune Creator* only three. In *The One, the Three and the Many* Gunton repeatedly describes sin as "displacement of God" and identifies its societal aspects. There is, however, a bit broader of a discussion of evil in *The Actuality of Atonement*. Whitney also identifies four reasons why Gunton does not spill much ink on sin. First, that his overarching goal is to show what humans can do within the give created world. Second, humanity's relationship to and negative influence on the created world has been overlooked. Third, Gunton sees the social and structural aspects of sin have been neglected in the history of Western theology due to the focus on personal or individual sins. Fourth, scripture primarily discusses sin in the context of salvation and what God has done to defeat sin (Whitney, 125–28).

In *The Christian Faith*, Gunton defines sin as "the disruption or distortion of the relation of personal beings with the personal creator God, a disruption that in mysterious fashion incorporates the whole created world in its structures" (Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 59). He also addresses this in *Christ and Creation*:

The doctrine of original sin holds that somewhere in the past of the human race...there took place a determination of the human race to a disrupted or disorderly relation to God.... On the other hand, the doctrine of actual sin – the present tense of the doctrine – teaches that all human beings have their being in a network of disrupted relations between the human race and God – in structures that are shaped by original sin – so that as a matter of fact apart from redemption, they are able to replicate only the patterns of disorder (Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 45).

actions of the Spirit in order to interact with creation and create a culture that is a glimmer of finite perfection and not a desecration or betrayal of the eschatological future of creation.<sup>113</sup> He notes, “As things are, the human race fails in its cultural mandate and, *consequently*, the remainder of the creation fails to be offered in praise to its Maker.”<sup>114</sup> The ongoing perfection of the created world only occurs *through* its redemption by Jesus in the Spirit.<sup>115</sup> Human culture that is faithful to the human calling to be a sacrifice of praise is always a gift of the Spirit of Christ.

It is important for Gunton that instances of created perfection by the Spirit are not limited to Christians alone because “the Spirit is free to enable those who by no

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Note that both definitions describe sin as a “disruption” or “distortion” of relationships. The work of the “two hands” of God – the renewal of creation through the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of the Son and the eschatological particularization of creation by the Spirit – is what reorients creation and humanity’s relationship with God. Evil and sin will be destroyed, finally, eschatologically. The Spirit allows, in Christ, persons to have correctly ordered relationships with God, other persons, and material creation in anticipation of this eschatological reality.

Gunton’s focus on sin as primarily social and societal is helpful for a dissertation concerned with human culture-making, which has personal, social, and ecological implications. In *The One, the Three and the Many* Gunton identifies modernity’s central failing as idolatry, “a displacement of God and the replacing of the creator by the creature” (Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 210). Gunton is centrally critiquing intellectual developments and patterns of thoughts that had societal influence. Human knowledge is in need of revelation from God, which only can happen by the actions of the Spirit liberating and freeing human beings from sin and drawing them to perfection. Perfection is an overcoming of the time-bound and place-bound destructive consequences of both personal and systemic sin.

<sup>113</sup> “Complications begin to arise with the entry of sin into the world, so that the perfecting of nature is placed in the hands of those not only made in the image of God, but now also fallen, so that it is in what is made of nature by sinful (and sometimes reconciled) men and women that we can understand something of the Spirit’s cosmic office” (Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” 200).

<sup>114</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church’s Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 81–2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

means confess God's being and action to achieve the greatest of things."<sup>116</sup> Good human culture, wherever and by whomever, anticipates the eschatological perfection of creation because the grace of the Spirit enables it to do so. Not all human cultural-making is faithful to the vision of the Spirit's perfecting mission. And yet, Gunton argues, "even when it becomes demonic...culture is never outside the overruling power of God, but is sometimes allowed to take its destructive course."<sup>117</sup>

In light of the potential for both good and evil human culture, Gunton asks: When is our engagement with and use of creation and its creatures (our culture and particularizing actions) "properly called a sacrifice – an offering of praise to God – and when is it improper exploitation?"<sup>118</sup> Judgment about whether or not the character of human culture and dominion is sinful or praiseworthy is offered in light of the human calling to offer a "sacrifice of praise." This is a necessary criterion "by which we may seek to judge whether or not any given cultural activity or artifact is the gift of the Spirit, and that is whether it enables the creature, human and non-human alike, to join in praise of the Creator by giving him glory."<sup>119</sup> This criterion is, again, Christologically construed and enabled by the perfecting and particularizing Spirit.

### **2.5.3 The Church as Cultivating a Distinctive Culture**

By constituting the church as the place for persons to learn how to live in anticipation of eschatological life, the Spirit, according to Gunton, is forming a particular

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<sup>116</sup> Gunton, "The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order," 202.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

kind of human *culture*.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, “it seems clear that in calling twelve disciples [Jesus] was concerned at least with a form of culture in the broadest sense, a form of living together in response to God’s covenant mercies,” a call that resulted in the sending of the Spirit.<sup>121</sup> Like the twelve disciples who were called to Jesus and formed a new kind of community, the Spirit now draws persons together around the Good News of Jesus Christ in order to form communities with a distinctive polity and mode of being in the world – that of praise and worship.<sup>122</sup>

Gunton understands the church’s mode of being to be similar to Israel’s in that the church is also called out and distinguished from the surrounding culture, but it is unlike Israel in the sense that the surrounding people do not have to give up their particularity in order to be incorporated in the church.<sup>123</sup> The church’s mode of being within various cultures is defined in relation to the gospel of Christ and to the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise.

Although cultural particularity is upheld, this does not mean that Gunton accepts all form of human culture without critique. This is where his understanding of “sacrifice of praise” as the central evaluative criterion is important. He writes, “The church is accordingly a way of being *within* the wider social and political world which yet rejects the latter’s religious, social, political and legal institutions *in so far as* they claim absolute

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<sup>120</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church’s Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 82.

<sup>121</sup> Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” 198.

<sup>122</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 127–8.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

devotion.”<sup>124</sup> The criterion of praise, Christologically formed, is what judges and evaluates all particular cultural forms, “because only in Jesus do we know what right culture is” and learn to recognize a life enabled to be a true offering of praise to God.<sup>125</sup>

The culture of the church participates in the perfecting of creation by the power of the Spirit, and in so doing, witnesses to surrounding cultures, offering a different vision for the relationality of human life and engagement with the non-human creation. Gunton emphasizes, “Christianity’s calling in the world remains that of offering the modern world a redemptive vision, centred on the life, death and resurrection of him through whom all things cohere.”<sup>126</sup> This vision, oriented to praise and thanksgiving to God, is one that enables true particularity-in-relation. This is true, in Gunton’s work, for not only immediate human relationships but also art, politics, and science, which he likens to the transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth. All forms of human culture are blessed and reoriented toward praise and thanksgiving; they are liberated to patterns of relationality between humans and non-human creation that enable the flourishing of all particulars.<sup>127</sup> What Christians make of the material creation “should offer a vision of what it is to be in the image of God and a consideration of how we should seek to embody

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 131. Emphasis in original.

<sup>125</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church’s Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 93.

<sup>126</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 100.

<sup>127</sup> “If the true end of all human action is praise of the creator, of rendering to him due response for his goodness, we have here a common light to illuminate all the dimensions of human culture. To say that all action should take the form of the sacrifice of praise is to say that action toward the world is action directed to allowing that world truly to be itself before God. That will not prescribe in advance the form that any particular cultural enterprise should take” (Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, 227).

it in our communities of worship and life.”<sup>128</sup> By embodying and anticipating perfection, Christians embody the significance of Jesus’s death for the world.

#### **2.5.4 Summary**

The Spirit’s mediation, for Gunton, enables human participation in the perfecting and particularizing of the created order. He uses the term “dominion” to characterize the human calling to offer a “sacrifice of praise.” In Gunton’s use, however, this term denotes care and responsibility instead of domination or unlimited human power. Dominion is given for the use of creation to support human habitation and creation requires human engagement to become what it was created to be. Through engagement with the created order, humans also learn what it means to be human. Yet, humans lost dominion over creation in the Fall. This calling is restored only by the saving and perfecting actions of Jesus Christ and the Spirit. Offering a “sacrifice of praise” in the context of dominion is to give freedom to and receive particularity from non-human creatures in addition to human ones. In this way, by the Spirit, humans can anticipate the eschatological perfection of creation. Again, the paradigmatic example of this is the eucharist, where human and non-human creation comes together to praise God.

Dominion is only one way that Gunton writes about human engagement with creation. A second is human cultural production, which he defines as encompassing everything humans do with, through, and to the created order. All of this wide range of engagement potentially participates in the perfection of creation. Although not limited to Christians alone, the Church as a locus of the Spirit’s particularizing work cultivates a distinctive culture. This form of culture centers on the remembrance, praise, and worship

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<sup>128</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 118–9, cited in Whitney, 7–8.

of the triune God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. It is a different way of being within various human cultures, witnessing to them a way of relating to the created order in light of vision of redemption in Christ. This vision embodied in human culture-making is our “sacrifice of praise.”

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has used the categories of creaturely particularity, creaturely relationality, and creaturely mediation to, first, define the human vocation in creation as offering one’s life as a “sacrifice of praise” and, in so doing, participate in the Spirit’s economic mission to perfect the created order. Additionally, we have shown how the Spirit’s perfecting and particularizing mission includes enabling the Church to be a community that embodies, enables, and furthers the human calling to offer all of life as a “sacrifice of praise.”

Key to Gunton’s doctrine of creation, as we discussed in chapter 1, is the Spirit’s mission and role to perfect, and thus particularize, the creation, drawing it forward to its eschatologically destiny as well as upholding its being despite sin and estrangement from God. Perfection, on this account, is not to be understood as conforming all creatures to an ideal form, but as maintaining their integrity because of, and not despite, relation. Creaturely particularity is established only in relation, as the model of the trinitarian relations show. Perfection is the ongoing project of the Spirit bringing the creation into relation with the Father through the Son. The Spirit-enabled incarnation of the Son is the paradigm for understanding the relationship between the Spirit and human beings; the

Spirit is the one who liberates and thus particularizes persons, enabling them to be themselves.

This chapter expanded on the Spirit's perfecting and particularizing mission, showing how the human vocation of offering a sacrifice of praise is established by the Spirit. Perfection is the goal of creation and is realized when creation reaches a state of praise and thanksgiving before God. Humans are created in the image of God – a relational and particularizing image centered on Jesus Christ – in order to praise in him by the Spirit. As the image of God, they engage with the non-human creation in such a way as to particularize, and thus anticipating the perfection of, other creatures. This particularizing and perfecting relationship is how humans have dominion in creation and how creation is enabled to participate in humanity's praise of God.

We also observed how the Spirit works in creation to gather a group of people, the Church, around the crucified and risen Jesus Christ so that Christians can live into the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise and participate in the Spirit's perfecting of creation. This mission of the Spirit calls the church to become a microcosm of new creation, a place within creation that the reconciled relationships of the end are anticipated in the present. Thus, local church communities are where Christians learn how to be the image of God, learn how to act in the present in order to be an echo of the triune life of the living God. Both individuals and communities are to offer their lives as a sacrifice of praise through the work of human culture-making.

The weakness of Gunton's construal of the human vocation in creation as offering a sacrifice of praise, however, is a lack of examples. Despite his stated concern for particularity and his helpful grounding of the human vocation in the work of the triune

God, Gunton offers little in the way of particular concrete exemplification of what a “sacrifice of praise” looks like in practice. The vision of “sacrifice of praise” as presented by Gunton is not sufficiently generative of specific cultural, artistic, or ecological practices that will enable persons to participate in the Holy Spirit’s perfecting of creation. In light of this weakness, in chapter 3 we will seek to determine whether and to what degree Gunton’s integrative vision of human culture – which he often describes as the unity-in-diversity of truth, goodness, and beauty – can provide a foundation for concrete practices to realize the human vocation in creation.

## Chapter Three

### The Human Vocation to Offer a “Sacrifice of Praise” and an Integrative Vision of Human Culture

*I believe that the cultural disarray that is so marked a feature of our times derives from our failure to integrate or combine the different objects of human thought and activity: in brief, science, morals and art.<sup>1</sup>*

Colin Gunton

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter we explored Colin Gunton’s vision of the human vocation within the created world. There we argued that, for Gunton, the human vocation in creation is a calling to offer one’s life as a “sacrifice of praise” and, in so doing, participate in the Holy Spirit’s mission to eschatologically perfect the created order. By the end of the chapter we had established that a sacrifice of praise, according to Gunton, is lived out through activities of culture-making and engagement with the created order.

Musing on the relationship between human culture-making and his vision of participating in the Holy Spirit’s perfecting of the created order, Gunton writes, “Moving from a certain kind of life, death and resurrection to judgements on culture requires the

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<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 115.

wisdom that does not come easily, because there are immense complexities.”<sup>2</sup> Here, Gunton hints at a major difficulty of his project: his work offers us a paucity of concrete examples of how to use the criterion of sacrifice of praise to evaluate actual, particular instances of human cultural production, economy, or community.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider whether and to what degree Gunton’s integrative vision of human culture – which he often describes as the unity-in-diversity of truth, goodness, and beauty – can provide a foundation for concrete practices to realize the human vocation in creation. We will argue that Gunton’s vision for integrated forms of culture-making calls for particularizing practices that combine embodied ways of knowing and imagining the world with a concern for the right use of material things; both art making and aesthetics are suggested as key loci for the practice of particularizing and, thus, potential participation in the Spirit’s perfection of the created order through offering a “sacrifice of praise.” This chapter is significant to the overarching argument of my dissertation because it offers a bridge between Gunton’s overly broad characterization of the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise and the concrete practice of actual ethical engagement with created particulars. The following chapters on Wendell Berry will extend this connection further.

In order to substantiate this argument, we will proceed as follows. This chapter will open with an overview of Gunton’s cultural vision, which integrates truth, goodness, and beauty with the aim of healing cultural fragmentation. The following three sections

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<sup>2</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church’s Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes (Milton Keynes, U.K.; Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Press, 2008), 93.

are organized around the three great transcendentals as Gunton characterizes them: the True (associated with science or knowledge), the Good (associated with ethics or action), and the Beautiful (associated with art or aesthetics). First, in relation to the True, we will consider Gunton's account of human imagination, metaphor, and embodied ways of knowing creation. Second, in relation to the Good, we will return to where we left off last chapter in considering human culture as the mediating factor between humans, God, and the non-human creation in order to get a sense of the associated ethic – an “ethic of createdness” – necessary for the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise. Third, in relation to the Beautiful, we will turn to art making and aesthetics as key cultural loci for the practice of particularizing, and thus for anticipating the eschatological perfection of the created order. Note that Gunton's appropriation of the great transcendentals for his own project, however, is not always consistent or clear and we will attempt to synthesize his vision from across his published works.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Note, for example, in the following quotations how he seamlessly identifies one set of terms with another: “we should be able to hold in some positive relation, yet without reducing one to another, the three central dimensions of human being: its formation by truth, goodness and beauty. Without a measure of integration of our knowledge, ethics and experience of beauty we are not fully what we might be” (Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 117). A few pages later, he writes, “First, there is the question of the unity and diversity of human cultural enterprise, and in particular the relation in unity of the three classical realms of culture, truth, goodness and beauty (or science, ethics and art)” (ibid., 151). His use of both sets of terms is nearly synonymous and representative of how he employs them throughout his writing. The transcendentals are a way to refer “abstractly” to the realms of human culture (ibid., 168).

### 3.2 ***Cultural “Sacrifice of Praise”*: An Integrative Vision of Human Culture**

Gunton’s work, principally in his book *The One, the Three and the Many*, is concerned to present a theological vision of the human place and vocation in creation that is able to interrelate and unify three realms of being and meaning: the personal world (the being-in-relation of human beings), the material world, and culture (the realm of knowledge, action, and art).<sup>4</sup> Specifically in relation to this third realm, culture – which Gunton variously identifies as the realm of truth, goodness, and beauty, or science, ethics, and aesthetics, or knowledge, action, and art – he develops a theology of the unity of culture by drawing upon the relational concept of *perichoresis* explored in chapter 1.<sup>5</sup>

For Gunton, the terms truth, goodness, and beauty are useful for describing a cultural vision of human life that includes all aspects of our thinking, being, and making. He is not particularly interested in using them to describe or define the being of God – I cannot find an instance where he does – but instead uses them to speak of the cultural and material lives of human beings. This use of the “great transcendentals” is to be distinguished from his quest for open transcendentals in *The One, the Three and the Many*. There he seeks “notions which can be predicated of all being by virtue of the fact that God is creator and the world is creation” and concerns himself with “finding a way of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>5</sup> “True culture is the achievement of particular instances of the good, the true and the beautiful in anticipation of the eschatological completion of all things.... To speak of the good, the true and the beautiful is an inclusive way of speaking of the whole gamut of right human action” (Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford, U.K.; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 50).

speaking of all being.”<sup>6</sup> Although Gunton believes that identifying open transcendentals will assist in addressing the cultural fragmentation of truth, goodness, and beauty, this chapter is concerned with his more general use of the great transcendentals. That is, how does Gunton understand truth, goodness, and beauty as advancing the human cultural engagement with the created order?

We will recall that, “Culture is all those things which human beings make of the created order...including those only apparently non-material dimensions like words and music.”<sup>7</sup> And it is through cultural production that humans exercise their calling to have dominion and, subsequently, participate in the Holy Spirit’s perfection of the created order. Yet, Gunton credits “the cultural disarray that is so marked a feature of our times derives from our failure to integrate or combine the different objects of human thought and activity: in brief, science, morals and art.”<sup>8</sup> In response, Gunton seeks a trinitarian vision of culture that is able to hold in creative tension three overlapping but distinct cultural spheres of activity. Culture, on this account, is an interrelated and mutually supported whole.

Gunton considers Immanuel Kant to be a key representative of ways of thinking in which the three great transcendentals – the True, the Good, and the Beautiful – have

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<sup>6</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 136–37, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church’s Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 79. Elsewhere he writes, “As nature is that which comes from the hand of the Creator, so culture is all the things that human beings do to, with, and in that created world” (Colin E. Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 2 (2002): 200).

<sup>8</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 115.

been divorced from one another, with the True – associated with mind or reason – elevated above the other two. According to Gunton, “Kant helped to generate the fragmentation of modern culture by tending to identify science with truth [and reason], ethics with the will...and aesthetics with subjective judgment.”<sup>9</sup> Since, on Kant’s account, all truth is objective truth, the relations between the three key areas of human experience were “rendered intrinsically problematic because their basis is to be found in different realms of being.”<sup>10</sup> In this outlook, the rationality of the human mind is elevated well above subjective feelings and emotions.

In contrast to Kant and various other thinkers since the Enlightenment, Gunton seeks to reintegrate truth, goodness, and beauty, desiring to validate the richness and diversity of human culture and experience. He believes that science, ethics, and art, for example, “cannot be understood without reference beyond themselves, for their realms impinge upon all others.”<sup>11</sup> Human beings are formed through these three spheres of human cultural activity. “Without a measure of integration of our knowledge, ethics and experience of beauty we are not fully what we might be.”<sup>12</sup> In the terms of the previous chapter, offering a sacrifice of praise through practices of dominion requires the imaginative integration of the whole human person and the full diversity of her cultural experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 115–16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 117.

Gunton argues “that the way in which we conceive human life in its fullness is closely bound up with the way we conceive its universal framework.”<sup>13</sup> History has shown that conceiving of this ultimate framework in an undifferentiated way has stimulated cultural fragmentation. In response to this judgment, he aspires to show that by conceiving of God in a trinitarian fashion – “a God who contains within himself a form of plurality in relation and creates a world which reflects the richness of his being” – humans can take steps toward healing cultural fragmentation.<sup>14</sup> He continues, “The downgrading of plurality [and particularity] involves a downgrading of the beautiful, or certainly of materially embodied beauty.”<sup>15</sup> The universal framework must, therefore, uphold the particularity and integrity of truth, goodness, and beauty while, at the same time, integrating them into a cultural whole.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the way that Gunton understands the relations between created particulars is as analogous to the perichoretic intra-relations of the triune persons. He also understands the relations between the personal or social world of human beings, the material world, and culture to be characterized by this same perichoretic particularity-in-relation. He writes, “I want to approach the question of the interrelatedness of person and nature through a discussion of the *perichoresis* of culture and of meaning.”<sup>16</sup> Since the created order is, so to say, perichoretic “all the way down,”<sup>17</sup> insight into one cultural realm will provide insight into the other two.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 140. This is why metaphors, as ways to represent and interact with the created world, are so important to Gunton. We will explore issues of language and metaphor in the following section.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 174.

### 3.2.1 The True: Embodied Knowing, Imagination, and Metaphor

We begin our consideration of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty with Gunton's account of human knowing, imagination, and the importance of metaphor for human language. Truth represents a cultural process of coming to perceive, attend to, and understand the created order through human engagement. And although our discussion focuses on how Gunton understands humans as coming to know the world through indwelling and language, it also always implicitly involves art, because for Gunton, art assists us in coming to indwell the world.

#### 3.2.1.1 *Embodied Knowing & Tacit Knowledge*

The first great transcendental is the True, which Gunton also associates with knowledge and science. In his article "Knowledge and Culture: Towards an Epistemology of the Concrete," Gunton argues for a Polanyi-inspired knowledge-by-acquaintance, "an epistemology in which claims for knowledge derive from the concrete relation in which a person exists with reference to whom and what he knows."<sup>18</sup> Michael Polanyi (1891-1976), a scientist and philosopher, is known for advocating a relational rather than an objectivizing conception of knowledge. Human knowledge, both rational and abstract, arises from familiarity with, and is a function of concrete and particular relation in creation; this is knowledge through indwelling the world, not observing it from a distance. All knowledge on this account, then, is materially embodied.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from Dr. Jeremy Begbie.

<sup>18</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Knowledge and Culture: Towards an Epistemology of the Concrete," in *Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hugh Montefiore (London: Mowbray, 1992), 99.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Most importantly – and this relates to Gunton’s account of creaturely particularity – “Polanyi hoped to demonstrate that the basis of knowledge is a form of *particularity*: not the particularity of a disembodied empiricism, but that of an embodied mind in particular and determinate relations with the world.”<sup>20</sup> In order to do so, Polanyi emphasized the sense of touch over the other four senses, explaining that touch “has the effect of bringing us into contact with reality rather than distancing us from it.”<sup>21</sup> The sense of touch is our real, particular connection with the created world. Through the sense of touch, humans develop what Polanyi called “tacit knowledge,” acquired through familiarity with the world, not facts or information about the world. Like the skill of riding a bike, tacit knowledge must be acquired by doing. And through this kind of knowledge, we always “know more than we can tell.”<sup>22</sup>

In outlining Polanyi’s account of tacit knowledge, Gunton cites Polanyi’s example of a blind person and his walking stick. Gunton explains, “When the blind man has assimilated, so to speak, the stick that he uses [to navigate the world], it becomes part of his *tacit* knowledge. It is known, but not consciously used.”<sup>23</sup> The stick becomes an extension of the person, through which he interacts with the world. When a tool or a skill has been completely assimilated in this way, we may say that a person *indwells* it.<sup>24</sup> Yet, what humans indwell through the senses, particularly the sense of touch, stands in real

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<sup>20</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 43. Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Enlightenment & Alienation: An Essay toward a Trinitarian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. Emphasis in original.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, “In order that the blind man may perceive his world he must *indwell* the stick he carries. The conception of indwelling is, of course, metaphorical” (*ibid.*, 40; emphasis in original).

continuity with us and not merely outside of us. Polanyi's account of knowledge as indwelling "sees knowing as a process rather than some abstractly perfected state, a process of movement from the partially empty [cupboard of the mind] to the less empty. Knowing, that is, is seen in terms of learning."<sup>25</sup>

Gunton's adoption of Polanyi's insights into materially embodied knowledge begins (unsurprisingly in light of chapter 1's discussion) with the immanent trinitarian relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the trinity's economic actions in history. The trinitarian persons confer particularity upon one another and on the creation. They act in history – paradigmatically in the incarnation – to perfect, liberate, and save creation. This historical grounding, according to Gunton, supports an epistemology that "integrates rather than alienates the particular and the general, and the imaginative/concrete and the rational," and one in which relation is prior to knowledge.<sup>26</sup> And since the triune God is personal and relational, Gunton accords a central place to the Holy Spirit as enabling the human discovery of the world.<sup>27</sup>

Gunton's claim for the Gospel's relevance to modern culture – rooted in its imaginative and creative, yet embodied epistemology – is key to linking knowledge and action.<sup>28</sup> This epistemology encourages creative improvisation, not stilted or wooden application of precepts or rules: "The Gospel's unique contribution to epistemology is best illustrated by means of an instance of creative and imaginative rationality [e.g., the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>26</sup> Gunton, "Knowledge and Culture: Towards an Epistemology of the Concrete," in *Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 94.

incarnation], which is still essentially grounded in the concrete and the particular.”<sup>29</sup>

Indwelling the Good News, by the power of the Spirit, allows Christians and church communities to potentially (but not automatically or absolutely, due to the destructive and blinding power of sin) imagine new modes of being in the world, new modes of relations with other persons and creatures – and by extension new modes and practices of culture-making – that offer a sacrifice of praise to God.

### 3.2.1.2 *Imagination*

Polanyi recognized, however, the importance of personal training to perceive the world as it is. “Imagination, says Polanyi, feeds on experience and allows us to understand the world.”<sup>30</sup> It mediates between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. Gunton turns to Samuel T. Coleridge (1772–1834) to understand imagination’s role in understanding and experiencing the world. For Coleridge, in a similar way to Polanyi, the imagination is an intermediary faculty between sense and reason, and imagination itself is both an active and a passive faculty.<sup>31</sup>

Coleridge’s “great contribution,” according to Gunton, was his distinction between “fancy” and imagination. Citing Coleridge, Gunton writes that the superior degree of imagination is “the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and...a repetition of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I Am.”<sup>32</sup> This is in contrast to mere fancy, “the mind’s aimless and uncontrolled (‘Pavlovian’) reaction to stimuli.”<sup>33</sup> Fancy, according to Coleridge, “creates nothing new, whereas the imagination, and by

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Gunton, *Enlightenment & Alienation: An Essay toward a Trinitarian Theology*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 32, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

implication all the arts and crafts which depend upon it, are the means by which new realities come to be.”<sup>34</sup> Imagination, in its “superior degree of the faculty,” enables humans to come into contact with what is “really there” in the created order, mediating between bodily senses and the intellect.<sup>35</sup> In this way, “we are able to penetrate and, indeed, repeat after it, the very divine act of creation.”<sup>36</sup>

This act of imaginative creation, according to Gunton, occurs “on the basis of the prevenient divine ordering.”<sup>37</sup> Gunton thus rejects any sense that art or human making relies on Platonic notions of “timeless or intellectual forms.”<sup>38</sup> Instead, Gunton is clear that any imaginative creation by humans only occurs in response to and on the basis of what has been received from the *past*.<sup>39</sup> This is not creation *ex nihilo*, but creative engagement and reordering on the pattern on divine creation. Imagination, on this account, “is an essential part of our openness to the world,” a world that we can really know because we are creaturely beings who are to a large degree continuous with it and, at the same time, “able to transcend it through out personal powers of perception, imagination and reason.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” *Modern Theology* 2, no. 1 (1985): 11.

<sup>35</sup> Gunton, *Enlightenment & Alienation: An Essay toward a Trinitarian Theology*, 33, 32.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 39; Gunton, *Enlightenment & Alienation: An Essay toward a Trinitarian Theology*, 48. He adds, “A world that owes its origin to a God who makes it with direct reference to one who was to become incarnate – part of that world – is a world that is a proper place for human beings to use their senses,

### 3.2.1.3 *Metaphor and Knowing*

In addition to embodied knowing and the mediating role of the imagination, metaphor, for Gunton, is a key way humans are enabled to engage with the world. Though he focuses specifically on metaphor and language, Gunton sees the process of metaphor as relevant to all artistic making.<sup>41</sup> He begins his consideration of metaphor in *The Actuality of Atonement* by outlining and subsequently rejecting Enlightenment accounts of language and metaphor. According to Enlightenment reasoning, “what cannot be translated from metaphorical into ‘literal’ language cannot be held to be true. On such an account, metaphor is disqualified from being a means of our rational interaction with the world: *unless it ceases to be metaphor, it cannot tell the truth.*”<sup>42</sup> In contrast to this view, Gunton argues that metaphors “are so pervasive a part of our experience that they are a, if not *the*, clue to what language is and does.”<sup>43</sup> Metaphor is therefore critically important to understanding cultural and artistic ways of engaging the created order.

Breaking down hard and fast distinctions between the categories of “literal” and “metaphorical” language, Gunton claims that no words are literal or metaphorical at all times, in all uses, in all places. Instead, he emphasizes “*The difference between literal and*

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minds and imaginations, and to expect that they will not be wholly deceived in doing so” (ibid., 49).

<sup>41</sup> Gunton does not, however, make the connections between metaphor and non-linguistic practices of art making clear in his work. The text where he engages metaphor most fully is *The Actuality of Atonement*, which is concerned with language used to describe the atonement of Christ. He only makes passing reference to “artists” generally, seeming to imply all art forms. Luckily, poetry – as we will explore in the next three chapters – is a linguistic practice of art making, making the connection with Gunton’s account of metaphor applicable.

<sup>42</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, 30. Emphasis in original.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 32. Emphasis in original.

*metaphorical is a difference between different ways of using a word in discourse.*<sup>44</sup> Truth about the world can be expressed in both literal and metaphorical ways. What is more important is the ability for our language to express human interaction with the created order both truthfully and successfully.<sup>45</sup>

For Gunton, metaphor is the linguistic practice of juxtaposing concepts or notions that are and remain distinct: “Metaphor claims only an *indirect* purchase on reality, bringing to expression some but not all aspects and relationships of the segment of the world to which it is directed.”<sup>46</sup> Metaphor’s characteristic indirectness is key to understanding the relationship between human language and the created order. Since, for Gunton, “the world can be known only indirectly,” and metaphor is an indirect way of engaging the world, metaphor is “the *most appropriate form* that a duly humble and listening language should take.”<sup>47</sup>

Metaphorical language does not force a predetermined rational order upon some formless world – as was always the tendency in Enlightenment language theory – but instead assists in the discovery of fresh knowledge. To illustrate this point, Gunton specifically engages scientific modes of reasoning and discovery, one context in which people tend to assume that language is completely “literal.” Instead, he urges that scientific discovery relies heavily on the use of metaphor. In the scientific process, Gunton writes, metaphor does not precede discovery, in the sense that once the “knowledge” has been discovered the metaphor can be discarded. Rather, through metaphor, “new

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 35. Emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 34. Emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 37. Emphasis added.

language and discovery happen together, with metaphor serving as the *vehicle* of discovery.”<sup>48</sup> In this example, language functions as an important part of scientists’ interaction with the created world. Metaphor can be, therefore, “*revelatory* of the world we live in.”<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2.1.4 *Metaphor and Harmony/Adaptation*

Gunton writes that metaphor is one tool available “to accomplish the task of *accommodation of language to the causal structure of the world*.... Language, to speak about the world must become, so to speak, ‘world-shaped.’”<sup>50</sup> It is not only a tool to describe the world from a distance, but enables humans to indwell and experience the reality that our language seeks to describe. According to Gunton, “the world gives itself to be understood in the sense that its perceived and experimentally revealed structures demand of us changes in our language.”<sup>51</sup> For Gunton, metaphor is a, if not *the*, key tool for language adaption. This accommodation of human language – and therefore human knowledge – to the patterns and structures of the created order is accomplished primarily through the use of metaphor, which allows us to be true to and discover the nature of reality.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 31. Emphasis in original.

<sup>49</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 10. Emphasis added. Although Gunton is focused on the sciences here – in order that his argument will not be disregarded as something only applicable to the arts – the potentially revelatory nature of metaphoric language is true for the arts as well.

<sup>50</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, 31. Emphasis in original.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 48. Also, “When we open ourselves to the world with the help of the language, the world – if we have found the right metaphor – will enforce, so to speak, changes in the meaning of the words we use. Metaphor thus makes possible a dual process, of discovery and the development of our language better to speak about its object” (ibid., 45).

Through the process of becoming “world-shaped,” our language participates in a kind of conversation between the world’s “language” and our own.<sup>52</sup> Language opens us to the world, with words enabling human relations with the created order.<sup>53</sup> As with any conversation, Gunton writes, “there can be exploitation, misunderstanding and deliberate deafness, but equally, the excitement of successful communication and discovery.”<sup>54</sup> The successful use of metaphor results in a kind of harmony – the “supreme instance” of harmony!<sup>55</sup> – between our language and the reality which we are describing. Though again, since metaphor addresses reality indirectly, it is an indirect harmony that “neither attempts to tie up the world in concepts pretending to finality (the error of all rationalisms) nor regards it as unknowable in its materiality (the error of empiricism and subjective idealism).”<sup>56</sup> Concord between language and object, human mind and the created order is always provisional. Although provisional and ever-developing, Gunton insists, this harmony is “a real achievement nonetheless.”<sup>57</sup> We do, in fact, come to know and indwell the world.

However, Gunton notes that metaphor and “poetic imagery [are] not so much a reflection of a harmony as the attempt to restore one which is lost.”<sup>58</sup> This is because, in light of the fall, the human use of language and engagement with the created order must

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>53</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 6.

<sup>54</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 37. See also, *ibid.*, 10–11

<sup>56</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 10–11.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 11.

always “necessarily take the form of a re-creation, of a re-ordering of that which is out of place as well as an ordering of material given to hand and mind.”<sup>59</sup> The fallen creation is still good, but is broken largely through human activity. Therefore, all human linguistic and artistic activity aims “at both creation and re-creation: something new is made in such a way that there is also a making up of that which is lacking, a reintegration of the unity of things.”<sup>60</sup> Human making aims at anticipating teleological perfection.

Metaphor, as we have seen, constitutes a dynamic relationship between word and world that, to quote George Steiner, “reorganise[s] our habitation in reality.”<sup>61</sup> Attempting to accommodate human language to the created order, metaphors demand new ways of thinking and interacting with the world. Reciprocally, in the midst of this linguistic engagement, the world calls for new metaphors to deepen and particularize our knowledge. This is why, for Gunton, it is in the use of metaphor “above all that we find the overlap of concept and representation, reason and imagination, truth and beauty.”<sup>62</sup> Metaphor involves a coming together of human experience that unifies various dimensions of human culture. In this last quotation, we see how in Gunton’s thought the realms of truth and beauty – and although not mentioned here, that of goodness – cannot be kept apart. Truth, like beauty and goodness, is an embodied reality.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, 50.

<sup>62</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 8.

#### 3.2.1.4 *Summary*

In this section we have seen Gunton's attempt at offering an account of truth and knowledge that is not bound by a typically Enlightenment view of "objective" knowledge, but necessarily involves tacit and embodied engagement. Drawing on the work of Michael Polanyi, Gunton argues that knowledge is relational in structure and materially embodied. A form of material particularity is at the very foundation of our knowledge. Engaging with this particularity entails tacit awareness through physically indwelling the world. Indwelling draws on the faculty of the imagination to help us mediate and understand what we are experiencing. In concert with tacit knowledge, the use of metaphor allows humans to intentionally, yet indirectly, engage with reality. Metaphor achieves this by juxtaposing concepts that illumine one another yet remain distinct. It is a tool for both scientific discovery and artistic creation and enables the accommodation of language to the order and structure of the world. This accommodation results in an indirect harmony between our language and our world, a harmony that can serve to reorder and recreate our relation to the world we inhabit.

This section has said relatively little about artistic creation in relation to metaphor and instead followed Gunton's focus on language in general and its connection to imagination and knowledge. But Gunton's account of language is relevant to artistic practice more generally. Thus, this section has laid a foundation for understanding how human artistic activity might participate in human indwelling of their places, and in embodied and imaginative practices centered on adapting and particularizing our knowledge. Gesturing forward to our engagement with Wendell Berry's poetry in the next

three chapters, metaphorical language lies at the heart of poetic making in general, and of Berry's Sabbath poetry in particular.

### **3.2.2 The Good: Embodying Practicalities of Cultural Mediation**

#### *3.2.2.1 "Ethic of Createdness" As Our "Whole Way of Being in the World"*

The second great transcendental is *goodness*, variously associated by Gunton with ethics, morals, or action. Ethics, for Gunton, is "a whole way of being in the world."<sup>63</sup> If God's plan for creation is the perfection and therefore salvation of the whole created order, then all human action towards and with the material creation – culture-making, widely rendered, as well as art making specifically – will be implicated in this broad definition of ethics.

It is axiomatic for Gunton that the *telos* of all creation is, through being perfected by the Holy Spirit, to offer praise to the Creator.<sup>64</sup> This is the purpose for which humans are given dominion in creation. We recall that in the previous chapter dominion was defined as "a responsibility under God for the proper perfecting of created things."<sup>65</sup> All persons are called to "represent God to creation" in relationships that embody "love-in-freedom."<sup>66</sup> This is not a dominion of control or domination, but one that enables the

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<sup>63</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, *Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 13. Whitney notes that in Gunton's work ethics and culture are often synonymous: "Both culture and ethics involve a range of human activities as humans engage the world" (William B. Whitney, *Problem and Promise in Colin E. Gunton's Doctrine of Creation*, *Studies in Reformed Theology; Volume 26* (Leiden, NL; Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 174; emphasis in original). Human engagement with creation includes both the final products (culture) and the process (ethics).

<sup>64</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, *Didsbury Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, U.K.: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 96.

<sup>65</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 210.

created order to be and become itself. Likewise, Gunton recognizes art alongside dominion as “trinitarian imperatives” because “both are ways of fulfilling the command of the creator to those created male and female in his image.”<sup>67</sup> Art, like dominion and culture more generally, has the potential to participate in the Holy Spirit’s perfecting of the created order.

Yet, Gunton recognizes, “what constitutes the proper perfecting of any particular created being is not clear, and subject to much argument.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore this section will look more closely at the elements that constitute an ethic, a way of being in the world that is consonant with the goal of perfection. According to Gunton, only an “ethic of createdness”<sup>69</sup> is an appropriate correlate to his vision of the human vocation in creation as a sacrifice of praise. Although this concept is not fully developed and lacks significant concrete examples, the last few pages of Gunton’s book *The Triune Creator* provide a sketch of what an ethic of createdness might consist of.

First, an ethic of createdness is an *environmental ethic*, which wrestles with “a right use of the inescapable human dominion.”<sup>70</sup> Gunton’s focus is on human responsibility

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<sup>67</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 228.

<sup>68</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 229. For example, on the issue of food production, Gunton writes, “It does not follow necessarily that, simply because animals are alive and feel pain, we should never eat them.... It can be argued that to eat a chicken is not necessarily to deprive it of its proper being, while to keep it in batteries, deprived of light, air and space, is” (ibid.). Here he emphasizes the wide gray area of human interaction with the environment. How do our actions allow for both the created order to be what it is called to be and at the same time provide for human flourishing? The answers, as he indicates, are unclear and context dependent.

<sup>69</sup> Gunton adopts this term from Christoph Schwöbel: “What seems to be needed is not an ethics of creation, but an *ethic of createdness* which is informed by a *theology of creation*” (cited in ibid.; emphasis in original).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 228.

within the created order, both in terms of participation in the Holy Spirit's perfecting of creation and as a way of righting wrongs that humanity has perpetuated against the created order. He recognizes that many will consider his environmental ethic anthropocentric, but at the same time he is clear that he is highly critical of the modern perspectives that deify science, technology, and narratives of progress.<sup>71</sup>

Given his emphasis on the importance and goodness of the material creation and its eschatological destiny to be perfected, Gunton is surprisingly critical of theologies of creation that center on environmental concerns. This attitude seems to arise from a concern to do justice to the biblical text<sup>72</sup> and the breath of human engagement with the material creation, as well as an outright rejection of any hint of pantheism or panentheism. For example, he writes:

It is a mistake to treat what we call the material creation or the natural world in abstraction from its being in some way ordered to the human race. Whether or not this is 'anthropocentric' and ecologically incorrect, and whether indeed that matters, it seems to me the clear message of scripture. Human beings have a specific calling in relation to the remainder of creation and it is that of dominion, of representing, mediating indeed, the rule of God the creation's Lord. The failure to exercise that calling is in some way responsible for the fact that the creation does not realize its calling, which is to share in the liberty of God's children.<sup>73</sup>

Gunton is not denying that there is an ecological problem. Instead, he disagrees that privileging environmental concerns over human concerns is the best means of ordering humanity's relationship with other creatures.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> This concern likely arises from the call to have dominion and to make something of the world as discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>73</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, U.K.; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 193.

The ecological problem, according to Gunton, “is a failure to coordinate” human beings and the created order, and thus a failure “to recognize the differences between person and the world, while [at the same time] respecting the proper being and status of the natural world.”<sup>74</sup> He highlights two issues that complicate the human ability to coordinate the created order and human being. First, there is no human making or engagement with the world that will not result in some form of destruction or change. A key question arises here: Since no human actions are free from all problematic consequences and there will, therefore, always be an ecological problem, “does the destruction conform to and is it consistent with the praise of God?”<sup>75</sup> Second, human sinfulness has the potential to pollute whatever it touches. A perennial concern is idolatry, the worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. In modernity idolatry manifests itself in the centering of human beings and their desires and the decentering of God’s mission of perfection through redemption. This displacement of God is, according to Gunton, “the heart of the problem.”<sup>76</sup>

Gunton rejects the indictment of anthropocentrism, claiming that our greatest concern is not anthropocentrism, “but the tearing apart of creation and redemption, so that redemption comes to appear to consist in salvation out of and apart from the rest of

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<sup>74</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 173.

<sup>75</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 125. The assumption that there will “always be an ecological problem,” however, seems to naively ignore the recognized differences in magnitude, breadth, and permanence that current patterns of ecological destruction – often due to the consumer-industrial economy – bring to places versus human engagement with the created order before the onset of industrialization.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

the world.”<sup>77</sup> His solution is, in part, for persons and communities to cultivate relationships that support created particulars – both human and non-human – and anticipate the eschatological perfection of creation. These relationships are necessarily wider for Gunton than ecological concerns; this is one reason why he highlights aesthetics and art.<sup>78</sup> Our mode of being in the world is more central for Gunton than any particular issue, even one as important as the ecological crisis.<sup>79</sup> For Gunton, anything we say about particular issues must grow from what we say about our being in relation to God.<sup>80</sup>

Second, the *Christian sacraments*, especially the eucharist, serve as a governing paradigm or image for an ethic of createdness that enables a life that is a sacrifice of praise. Gunton calls the sacraments the “crucial and definitive illustration of the eschatology of creation.”<sup>81</sup> This is because it is especially clear that the sacraments “would not be what they are except by virtue of the action of God the Spirit, the mediator of divine perfecting action.”<sup>82</sup> In the administration of the sacraments, “material creation is used in various ways to represent the death, resurrection, reign and return of Christ in glory,” as seen, for example, by the taking and breaking of wine and bread in the Lord’s

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>78</sup> Although I sympathize with Gunton’s concern and affirm the importance of all aspects of human making, I take issue with his disregard of the centrality of ecology for the doctrine of creation. We will engage these questions more in this dissertation’s conclusion.

<sup>79</sup> J. H. F. Schaeffer, *Createdness and Ethics: The Doctrine of Creation and Theological Ethics in the Theology of Colin E. Gunton and Oswald Bayer*, *Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann*, 0563-4288; Bd. 137 (Berlin, DE: De Gruyter, 2006), 85.

<sup>80</sup> Schaeffer clarifies this well when he explains, “Ethics [for Gunton] therefore is part of being human in the responsibility give by our ontological constitution as ‘relational beings.’” Ethics is wider than any particular ethical issue because it encompasses all the ways that humans are in relation (ibid., 87).

<sup>81</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 234.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 235.

Supper.<sup>83</sup> For Gunton, the participation of these created elements – which have been changed through cultural actions – in this most holy of Christian actions and their mediation of Christ by the Spirit, reveals that “the destiny of the whole creation is bound up first with the incarnate Lord and second with those created in the image of God, represented as they are by those who worship the Father through Christ in the Spirit.”<sup>84</sup> The eucharist, again, offers a paradigm for how humans are to relate to the created world.

The way in which the sacraments govern an ethic of createdness can be characterized in other terms. Gunton describes the human vocation to have dominion as the human priesthood of creation, or an “ethic of priesthood.”<sup>85</sup> Gunton writes, “*To be in the image of God is therefore to be called to represent God to the creation and the creation to God, so enabling it to reach its perfection.*”<sup>86</sup> This is to have a mediating, priestly role, following Christ our Mediator and High Priest by the Spirit, in the perfecting of material creation. As priests of creation, humans analogically image the priests of the Old Testament. He argues, “As the priest offers the animal without blemish on the altar, so we are to offer all the creation with which we have to do – all that is bound up most closely with us in the network of created reality – to God the Father.”<sup>87</sup> As the minister takes and breaks the elements of the eucharist in order to offer praise to God the Father through Christ in the Spirit, so too should all of our dealings with creation be filtered through an ethic of priesthood, yet only as humans are conformed to the image of the Son by the Spirit.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 119.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 103. Emphasis in original.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 119. Emphasis in original.

Gunton concludes that “to image the being of God towards the world, to be the priest of creation, is to behave towards the world in all its aspects, of work and of place, in such a way that it may come to be what it was created to be, that which praises its maker by becoming perfect in its own way.”<sup>88</sup>

Third, the issue of *temporality* is crucial to an ethic of createdness. Gunton suggestively, though very briefly, posits the truism that “we shall die” as a model for an eschatological ethic and human engagement with the created order. The perfection in which humans are called to participate, Gunton writes, “does not come from ourselves lasting forever or from attempting to make the earth eternal.”<sup>89</sup> Rather, the question posed by an ethic of createdness that seeks to enable life as a sacrifice of praise is this: “How should one bear oneself in a world that, like human being, receives its perfection only on the other side of death?”<sup>90</sup> This question reinforces Gunton’s affirmation in regards to ecology and culture-making that “short of the end, there are no final solutions.”<sup>91</sup> Instead, humanity is offered “the freedom sometimes to share through the Spirit in particular transformations of the world which are signaled by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”<sup>92</sup> Humility, then, is a necessary virtue.

Gunton freely admits that his version of an ethic of createdness does not provide answers, only “essential material for thought about the way we treat our world.”<sup>93</sup> But his

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>89</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 230.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 231. Elsewhere he states, “The promise is not of solutions, but of the freedom sometimes to share thought the Spirit in particular transformations of the world which are signaled by the

work strongly affirms the belief that God, as Son and Spirit, is personally at work in the world. This belief should shape how Christians enjoy and engage the material creation. Gunton's ethic of createdness explicitly incorporates relationships that go beyond ethics proper to include human creativity and art making. To affirm that God is creator is to concurrently affirm that nothing material can be given the status of divinity. God "excludes all rivals, both for his own sake and for that of the creature."<sup>94</sup> In that context, humans are called to recognize their createdness and the material creation's goodness by engaging in social, cultural, and aesthetic relations that respect the integrity of the other, while seeking to shape creation that gives forth to both freedom and beauty.<sup>95</sup>

#### 3.2.2.2 Summary

This section we found that Gunton associates the Good variously with ethics, morals, or action. It is, to quote Gunton, "a whole way of being in the world."<sup>96</sup> Since the human vocation in creation is to offer a sacrifice of praise with and on behalf of the material creation and in doing so participate in the "proper perfecting of created things," it necessarily requires a correlative ethic.<sup>97</sup> Actions of "proper perfecting" enable the

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resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 126). Schaeffer comments, "Whatever attention Gunton gives to the fall and the subsequent evil, sin and distortion, it does not seem that this attention leads to possible answers for concrete ethical questions in the present." He wishes instead "for ethics that reaches further than a description of one's directedness" (Schaeffer, 99). We will take up this critique with Berry's example in the conclusion

<sup>94</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, 49.

<sup>95</sup> Whitney evaluates Gunton's theory of culture positively in that it "urges one to engage with culture – to take pleasure in making music, creating art, and making spaces beautiful, as these activities are good in and of themselves since they are simply part of what it means to be a human creature" (Whitney, 185).

<sup>96</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*,

created order to be and become itself, a vocation requiring what Gunton calls an “ethic of createdness.” Although Gunton describes it only briefly, an ethic of createdness includes 1) an environmental or ecological ethic concerned with the effects of human culture on the created world, 2) an ethic of priesthood, for which the governing image is that of the Christian sacraments – material elements transformed by human hands and offered freely back to God – and 3) a clear view of creation’s (and our own!) temporality and mortality, forcing humans to recognize that all human actions and culture are forged in the context of death and teleological perfection. Although rough, this outline provides a sense of what kind of ethic Gunton is seeking to accompany his vision for the human calling in creation as a sacrifice of praise worked out through various forms of culture and art.

### **3.2.3 The Beautiful: Practices of Particularization**

In this final section, we turn to the third transcendental, the Beautiful, and a consideration of human art making. Gunton argues, “The eschatology of creation can be illustrated at greater length, riskily and apparently frivolously, by appeal to human artistic activity.”<sup>98</sup> Connecting this section to the previous section, issues of aesthetics are important for understanding an ethic of createdness because the concerns of human life are broader than humanity’s relation to the natural environment. Aesthetics – or the cultural realm of the Beautiful – encompasses all forms of human making.

#### *3.2.3.1 Works of the Arts, Aesthetics, and Particularity*

In the previous chapter, we cited Gunton’s broad definition of culture: “Culture is all those things which human beings make of the created order, what we call the material created order, including those only apparently non-material dimensions like words and

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<sup>98</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 231.

music.”<sup>99</sup> Similarly, in another text, he describes art as “that range of activities in which human agents interact with the material world...to produce things of beauty and use.”<sup>100</sup> Side by side, these two definitions seem to suggest that for Gunton “art” and “culture” – like “culture” and “ethics” in the previous section – are closely related, with art as a particular instance of human culture whose aim is primarily aesthetic.

Gunton does not, however, clearly differentiate between his use of the terms art, aesthetics, or beauty, often seamlessly moving between them. For example, he writes: “the primary function of a work of art is aesthetic, but that is not to say that beauty excludes the use of rational categories in its appreciation and interpretation.”<sup>101</sup> And again, “culture [is] the realm of knowledge, action and art, or, expressed abstractly, of truth, goodness and beauty.”<sup>102</sup> In these quotations, aesthetics seems to concern beauty, while the cultural realm of art is another way of referring to the cultural realm of beauty. Human aesthetic activity does appear, however, to be a broader category than art and to include other forms of human making. He writes, “Human aesthetic activity, ranging as it does from artistic achievement of genius to everyday creative and functional tasks, is aimed at both creation and re-creation.”<sup>103</sup> Gunton clearly indicates that “a true

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<sup>99</sup> Gunton, “Reformation Accounts of the Church's Response to Human Culture,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, 79. Elsewhere he writes, “As nature is that which comes from the hand of the Creator, so culture is all the things that human beings do to, with, and in that created world” (Gunton, “The Spirit Moved over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and Created Order,” 200).

<sup>100</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 231.

<sup>101</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 6.

<sup>102</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 168.

<sup>103</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 11.

aesthetics” is concerned with “an adequate account of the *materiality* of beauty” derived from a “theology of creation and incarnation.”<sup>104</sup> Aesthetics, for Gunton, is concerned with earthly beauty as well as with how that beauty is particularized in practices of human making.

In light of this, aesthetics is decidedly *not* the intellectualized version found in Plato, and to a different degree, in Augustine. For the Platonic tradition, matter is intrinsically opposed to form and “inherently disorderly and unbeautiful.”<sup>105</sup> Any beauty in the material realm, by its very nature, must direct attention to the eternal form of beauty. Gunton is concerned that, for Augustine, even though he acknowledges the goodness of creation, beauty still tends toward intellectualism: leading one’s mind “through the corporeal to the incorporeal.”<sup>106</sup> Augustine, according to Gunton, fails sufficiently to acknowledge the value of an object of material beauty.

Instead, aesthetics on Gunton’s account is chiefly concerned with the ways in which “art may be conceived to embody being, meaning and truth.”<sup>107</sup> He seeks an account of aesthetics that avoids being merely intellectual and grounds itself in the goodness of the created order. Distinguishing his view from a rationalist understanding of aesthetics that reduced beauty’s significance primarily to the intellect, Gunton wants a rational aesthetics, which attempts “to make sense of beauty, but on its own terms.”<sup>108</sup> These terms, for Gunton, are explicitly material and exemplify created particularity. This

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 17. Emphasis added.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 6. Citing *Retractationes* I.vi.

<sup>107</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 175.

<sup>108</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 6.

is because “The results of human craft or art are particular: the outcome of engagement with the material world in all its brute particularity and intractability.”<sup>109</sup> Beauty is not “the realisation in art of timeless or intellectual forms” but is instead is a “form which comes to be as the result of the ordering of matter.”<sup>110</sup> Art is about the aesthetic ordering and reordering of what is given to hand, receiving it as it comes from the past. Likewise, aesthetics is concerned with accounting for the range of the created order’s beauty.

Art as a particularizing and perfecting practice is an important locus of reflection for Gunton because, as he claims, “both forms of modern culture [modernism and postmodernism] are unable to deal happily with the particular in its relation to other particulars.”<sup>111</sup> Gunton understands the cultural category of aesthetics or beauty as able to address more fully the range of relations humans have with the created world – all human engagement with the created order through culture, broadly speaking. By including aesthetics as part of his criteria for sacrifice of praise, Gunton attempts to resist modernity’s utilitarian and mechanistic tendencies. He believes modern culture’s “treatment of the arts betrays the symptoms of a deep-seated moral predicament as the result of which we know how to behave neither toward each other nor toward the world” and “they form the most prominent symptom of the general disorder,” that characterizes the fragmentation of modern culture.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 50.

<sup>110</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 12.

<sup>111</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 69.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

For Gunton, part of “understanding beauty on its own terms” is developing a Christian account of aesthetics – which is, again, concerned with an “account of the *materiality* of beauty” instead of the immateriality of beauty – from the “theology of creation and incarnation in which the goodness and redemption of the material order is taught without an evasion of its fallenness into ugliness and disorder.”<sup>113</sup> Although the created order is not, as Plato believed, “inherently disorderly and unbeautiful,” it is fallen and often bears the scars of humanity’s sin.<sup>114</sup> This brokenness does not disqualify it, however, from goodness or beauty. God’s creation was created good and with a destiny of perfection. The goodness of creation was reaffirmed through the incarnation of Christ who took on flesh and redirected creation towards its final *telos*.

By grounding aesthetics in a theology of creation, Gunton believes, we are able to avoid competing accounts of aesthetics, beauty, and art making that are romantic or idealizing.<sup>115</sup> God is the creator *ex nihilo* and all human making takes its orientation from this fact. All human making, then, is a reordering of what is disordered and a new ordering, a new “sub-creation,” of what is given to hand. Gunton writes, “The artist is here at one with the craftsman and the ‘amateur’: each seeks to act as enabler, discoverer, inventor, one who creates as he or she enables the material world to take meaningful form.”<sup>116</sup> Aesthetic and artistic activity seek to “say” something new and, therefore, to re-create or reorder a disordered creation.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 17. Emphasis added.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

According to Gunton, the nature of God's creation is such that it is open to our engagement and re-forming. Matter is not intrinsically formless or resistant to form; creation has its own order, broken or hidden though it may be. Artistic recreation and reordering of creation does face varying degrees of resistance from matter, although this is, as Gunton has made clear, because it is fallen and thus "subject to futility" (Romans 8.20). Yet, the perfecting grace of the Holy Spirit in Christ offers the possibility of instances, echoes as we mentioned last chapter in relation to the church, of anticipating the final perfection of all things. As Gunton writes, "Such re-creation is the gift of God, realised through human activity."<sup>118</sup>

Works of the arts are particular objects whose creators have reordered the materials of creation. Therefore, art is one important instantiation of the particularization of the created order. The goodness of art and its capacity for form and meaning is rooted in its createdness, as discussed above.<sup>119</sup> Art making is a practice of particularization, following the particularization and perfection of the created order by the Holy Spirit. Gunton writes,

The significance of the arts for us is that they mark an important aspect of what we make of the particular things in our world. It is what we make of this piece of clay, that succession of tones, that makes all the difference. Change one note of a piece of music, and you have a different piece. The results of human craft or art are particular: the outcome of engagement with the material world in all its brute particularity and intractability.<sup>120</sup>

The arts do on a highly specific level what all of human culture does in general – they make something of this world, a particular something, that either constitutes a sacrifice of

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>120</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 50.

praise to God or does not. Art, as representative of all forms of human making Gunton attests, participates in the perfection of creation and witnesses to the redemption of all things through the practice of particularization when it aims to “produc[e] something as good as possible.”<sup>121</sup> Human art making “is redemptive in the sense that it is an activity which enables the creation to reach towards the perfection that is its destiny. And it enables us to articulate the criterion for an ethic of creation: action for the glory of God.”<sup>122</sup> When art enables particularization and participates in perfection, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit and an anticipation of the age to come.

As we saw above in relation to embodied knowledge, imagination, and metaphor, Gunton is concerned to widen the construal of “truth” beyond its reduction to the realm of reason. Art and aesthetics bear meaning, although not in the way of “direct correspondence or ‘mirroring’ of either timeless truths or of facts narrowly conceived.”<sup>123</sup> Aesthetic, material beauty has its own kind of meaning. It possesses its own logic, which is not merely subjective or emotional, but objective in the sense that it can be “discussed theoretically, and becomes the object of moral and intellectual appraisal.”<sup>124</sup> Gunton

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<sup>121</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 234. This simplistic rendering of art’s *telos* is somewhat problematic and needs to be interrogated, though there is not space in this dissertation to do so sufficiently. Briefly, I will note that the equation of something’s aesthetic “goodness” with its degree of conformity to eschatological perfection attends to only one possible use and motive of making art. What about art that intentionally witnesses to the brokenness of creation? Also, how is he defining “good”? He seems to be hinting at aesthetic excellence, but aesthetic excellence is only one possible criteria of “good.” For now let us merely acknowledge that there is some relation between human artistic activity broadly construed and human participation in the Spirit’s mission of perfection.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Gunton, “Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology,” 13.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

acknowledges that aesthetic and artistic meanings are difficult to interpret, and subject to much controversy and disagreement. Indeed, it is hard to come to clear agreement about what kind of meaning aesthetic meaning is, particularly because “art of all kinds is the product of mind as well as of feeling and imagination,” and involves the whole person.<sup>125</sup> However, this difficulty does not render art or aesthetics meaningless, Gunton argues, only theoretically elusive.<sup>126</sup>

Substantive, created particulars have reality and so are vehicles of meaning. As Gunton notes, “the primary function of a work of art *is* aesthetic, but that is not to say that its beauty excludes the use of rational categories in its appreciation and interpretation.”<sup>127</sup> By according reality and goodness to matter through his appeal to the doctrine of creation, Gunton is able to reject “a doctrine of the meaninglessness of material particulars” and in so doing, affirm that the world and human culture are enabled to speak – and to praise God – through faithful human engagement with the world via an ethic of createdness. What creation and culture “speak” are what Gunton in one place calls “cosmic words” that express a “cosmic meaning.”<sup>128</sup> Gunton seems to mean that the created order is given fresh expression and a fresh voice through cultural engagement and artistic practices of making. Artists and craftspersons both discover meaning inherent in the material world and create meaning through reordering that which is given-to-hand. It bears “cosmic” meaning because it witnesses to the order of creation as given by God, redeemed in Christ and upheld by the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 113–14.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Emphasis added.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

### 3.2.3.2 *Summary*

Aesthetics, for Gunton, is concerned with offering an account of the materiality of beauty, which is best represented by human artistic activity. Gunton understands works of the arts to be cultural objects that embody and reorder creaturely particularity. The arts are particularizing practices that acknowledge the goodness and beauty of the *material* creation, specifically. He is not especially concerned with how the material creation leads to or reflects immaterial beauty. Rejecting the Platonic tradition's stress on the transience or formlessness of matter, Gunton affirms the orderliness of creation even where this order has been broken or twisted. Works of the arts renew creation's order and create new order, which, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, may offer a sacrifice of praise in anticipation of the perfected creation. Art and aesthetics are, like reason and science, vehicles of meaning, though theoretically elusive. Through works of the arts, the material creation's voice is renewed and witnesses to its beauty, goodness, and future perfection. Art making is an imaginative practice that draws on ways of knowing discussed in the above section on the True, as well as potentially embodying a way of being in the world consistent with the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

By the end of chapter 2, we found that the concept of the sacrifice of praise as an orienting goal of human engagement with creation, while suggestive, was practically elusive, since Gunton does not offer many particular or concrete examples of humans

living into a sacrifice of praise in his work.<sup>129</sup> The purpose of this chapter has been to consider whether and to what degree Gunton's integrative vision of human culture –the unity-in-diversity of truth, goodness, and beauty or knowledge, ethics, and art – can provide a foundation for concrete practices to realize the human vocation in creation. We argued that Gunton's vision for integrated forms of culture-making calls for particularizing practices that combine embodied ways of knowing and imagining the world with a concern for the right use of material things. Art making was identified as a key locus for the practice of particularizing and, thus, potential participation in the Spirit's perfection of the created order through offering a "sacrifice of praise."

The True, Good, and Beautiful, on Gunton's account, require one another to be complete. Yet these spheres should not collapse into one another but perichoretically, we may say, maintain their own relative independence. For Gunton the analogy of *perichoresis* is a clue to how to integrate these three realms of meaning without conflating them or undermining their particularity.<sup>130</sup> He writes,

If the triune God is the source of all being, meaning and truth, we should be able to develop a theology of the unity of culture without depriving each of its dimensions of its distinctive approach and validity. It is in that respect that our concept [of *perichoresis*] enables us at least to consider the possibility that while the different areas of human thought, action and experience are each distinctive and to a degree autonomous, they cannot be understood without reference beyond themselves, for their realms impinge upon all others.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> David Höhne similarly observes, "Ironically, however, the breadth of [Gunton's] account leads ultimately to rather unsatisfactory generalities, considering we are in search of a concrete substantiality for persons." (David A. Höhne, *Spirit and Sonship: Colin Gunton's Theology of Particularity and the Holy Spirit* (Farnham, U.K.; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010), 22.)

<sup>130</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 176.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

As we have explored in this chapter, Gunton's construal of the three great transcendentals relates and integrates them without compromising their relative independence or integrity, while still suggesting a concrete practice – art making – that has the potential to unify them. Art making that seeks a created form of perfection, therefore, must attend to ways of knowing that allow one to indwell the created world, as well as suggest an “ethic of createdness” that guides how one acts within the world indwelt.

Hence, Gunton's vision for a unified human culture, one that integrates embodied versions of truth, goodness, and beauty, has the potential to suggest concrete practices of particularization, specifically art making, that enact Gunton's vision for human culture as offering a sacrifice of praise. This chapter has attempted to bridge Gunton's overly broad characterization of the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise and the concrete practice of actual ethical engagement with created particulars. Although Gunton's vision of culture-making does not succeed in offering a concrete program for offering a sacrifice of praise, it does point us in a generative trajectory: art making as a particularizing practice that can assist persons in engaging and coming to know the created order. What is still needed to fully imagine Gunton's vision of sacrifice of praise, however, is a *particular* example of such a life and artistic practice. The unitive and integrated cultural vision in this chapter calls for a concrete response. Part II of this dissertation will find its concrete and particularizing example in the Sabbath imagination and poetic practice of Wendell Berry.

**Part II:**

**Wendell Berry, Sabbath Poetry, and the Wholeness of  
Creation**

## Chapter 4

### Poetry and Place: Wholeness, Holiness, and a Locally Adapted Imagination

*If imagination is to have real worth to us, it needs to have a practical, an economic, effect. It needs to establish us in our places with a practical respect for what is there besides ourselves. I think the highest earthly result of imagination is probably local adaptation.<sup>1</sup>*

*Wendell Berry*

#### 4.1 Introduction

The overarching argument of this dissertation is that the integrative imagination of Wendell Berry, as embodied by his Sabbath poetry and poetic practice, can be employed to meet the deficiencies of Gunton’s vision of the human vocation in creation – a “sacrifice of praise” – while powerfully exemplifying Gunton’s major concerns. Berry uses locally adapted poetry as an ethical practice that helps form a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination, such that humans can perceive ways to work in harmony with the material creation. Crucial to this practice and formative process is a rich vision of the goal of Sabbath and, consequently, Sabbath-worthy work. His account of poetry and his own poetic output, together with analogous (agri)cultural practices, constitute a fully

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, “American Imagination and the Civil War,” in *Imagination in Place* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 34.

integrated vision of human culture-making – imagination, work, economy, and the arts – that advances the main trajectories offered by Gunton.

The previous chapter argued that Gunton’s construal of the human vocation in creation as a “sacrifice of praise” suggests an associated ethic that seeks an integrative vision of human culture to mediate our relation to the material world, encouraging embodied forms of knowing and indwelling to form the imagination, and suggesting art making and aesthetics as key loci for the practice of particularizing and thus anticipating the eschatological perfection of the created order. Yet Gunton’s work offered few particular concrete examples of his “sacrifice of praise” or “ethic of createdness” in practice.

Berry’s Sabbath vision concretely extends and exemplifies Gunton’s vision for human life as a “sacrifice of praise.” These two accounts of the human vocation resonate with each other because both Gunton and Berry keenly recognize the God-giftedness of creation. Berry’s perspective is from the “ground up,” as it were, in part employing the practice of poetry to attend ethically to created particularities in light of a holy vision of Sabbath rest. Gunton’s perspective is more overtly and rigorously theological, governed above all by a theology of the triune economy and the outworking of the economy within the created order, particularly the perfection of creation by the Spirit. As we will see in this and the next two chapters, Berry’s Sabbath vision, as embodied in his poetic practice, brings two key resources to Gunton’s pneumatological vision of the human vocation as offering a “sacrifice of praise”: i) a concrete and particular *example* of human engagement with place and culture-making that exemplifies Gunton’s desire for fully integrated

cultural engagement of the True, Good, and Beautiful, and ii) an *expansion* of Gunton’s vision of the human vocation vis-à-vis creation, that is, a “sacrifice of praise.”

In this chapter we will address Gunton’s concern for a fully integrated engagement between the realms of truth (knowing and imagination), goodness (ethics and action) and beauty (arts and aesthetics) by considering what Berry writes about the human imagination and its cultivation through the practice of poetry aimed at fostering a locally adapted imagination. We will argue that, according to Berry, a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination allows humans to come to know and indwell their places by enabling them to perceive creation’s wholeness, and that he cultivates this form of imagination in practices of poetry that wrestle with the limits and propriety of language in relation to a particular place.

## ***4.2 Imagination and Knowing: Perceiving Creation’s Wholeness***

### **4.2.1 Defining Wholeness: Health and Holiness**

Following Wallace Stegner, Wendell Berry divides Americans into two general categories: “boomers” and “stickers.”<sup>2</sup> Boomers are people who “pillage and run,” taking the easy money in exchange for the exploitation of a place. Stickers, on the other hand, choose to “settle, and love the life they have made and the place they have made it in.”<sup>3</sup> While the former are motivated by greed, the latter are motivated by affection. The difference between boomers and stickers, Berry claims, is a failure of *imagination*, one that, through the overwhelming prevalence of boomers in this country and global industrial

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<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry, “It All Turns on Affection,” in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

economy, is accelerating the destruction of land across the globe. Regretfully, Berry explains, “by economic proxies thoughtlessly given, by thoughtless consumption of goods ignorantly purchased, now we all are boomers.”<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Berry desires all persons to be “stickers.” To be a “sticker,” you must be able to imagine your place fully, complexly, and lovingly; you must imagine it as a place worthy of care and good work. It requires an imaginative vision that is able to conceive of and act for the healing of creation’s brokenness.

In light of the industrial economy’s failure of imagination, which perpetuates the ruin of people and places, Berry is interested in cultivating a sympathetic imagination that will enable him to see and act toward *wholeness*. Wholeness is a prominent theme throughout Berry’s work, in his poetry as well as his non-fiction. For Berry, wholeness characterizes the numerous patterns of healthy relational connections among all creatures in the material creation. The creation in which human persons are located is not a simple unity of beings but a complex network of mutual dependence, interdependence, and influence.<sup>5</sup> Berry uses the image of a “spherical network” to get at the complexity of relations within creation, or as he also calls it, the Great Economy.<sup>6</sup> This is not the simple linear or circular relationship illustrated by middle school science charts, but a complex network in which every part is related to and potentially influences every other part, “backward and forward, up and down, round and around, compounding and branching

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>5</sup> Wendell Berry, “The Body and the Earth,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Chapter 6 will further discuss the Great Economy.

as they go.”<sup>7</sup> In this type of relational network, problems can be introduced anywhere in the system and flow to other elements in the network. If the distortion becomes severe enough, the connections between creatures will be broken.

The network of creation is broken and diseased because of a failure of humans “to see the direct connections between living and eating, eating and working, working and loving.”<sup>8</sup> Health and healing requires humans to perceive (i.e., imagine!) these connections and reform them through good work. Reflecting on the poetry of William Carlos Williams, Berry writes, “The [human] imagination is our way into the divine Imagination, permitting us to see wholly – as whole and holy – what we perceive as scattered, as order what we perceive as random.”<sup>9</sup> Only the Lord sees the complete and integral wholeness, holiness, and goodness of the created order. A sympathetic and locally adapted imagination allows humans to perceive – only in glimpses – the possibility of the order of creation’s wholeness via a vision of its holiness. As the following chapters will explore, Berry’s integrative vision of and poetic engagement with Sabbath allows him to perceive and respect creation’s holiness.

Wholeness requires healthy connections between creatures, yet the concept of health in this context is broader than a mere “absence of disease.” Berry names a constellation of words that closely relate to “health”: “*heal, whole, wholesome, hale, hallow, holy.*”<sup>10</sup> This collection characterizes his rich and far-reaching vision of wholeness and its

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>9</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011), 90.

<sup>10</sup> Berry, “The Body and the Earth,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 98–99.

implications for the human engagement with the created order. To be not only minimally healthy but hale – vigorous and robust – often necessitates a process of healing. Yet healing must recognize not only physical but spiritual connections between creatures; creation is beloved of God and in relation with him. Creation’s holiness, therefore, requires human actions that hallow or respect creation’s wholeness and integrity. These actions should be wholesome, that is, life-giving. This constellation of words suggests how Berry’s vision of creation as whole, holy, and healthy implies human action that is both wholesome and hallowing.

Berry clearly states, “To be healthy is to be whole;” and yet also, “Persons cannot be whole alone.”<sup>11</sup> Creatures depend upon networks of other creatures to be healthy and whole. Berry believes that community, conceived of as land, persons, and creatures together, “is the smallest unit of health and that to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms.”<sup>12</sup> One cannot be healthy on one’s own since to be healthy is to be whole, and wholeness is predicated on healthy relationships within the network we are located. Our ultimate network is the entire earth, while our proximate networks are our local communities. This is why Berry firmly rejects any hint of spirit/body dualism. God’s “creation is one continuous fabric comprehending simultaneously what we mean by ‘spirit’ and what we mean by ‘matter.’”<sup>13</sup> Our bodies are both resolutely physical – we live by and are dependent on communities of creatures – and resolutely spiritual – we live by and are dependent on the borrowed breath of God.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 98, 99.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, “Health Is Membership,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 146.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 147.

For Berry, this failure to imagine human life within the complex dependencies that characterize the Great Economy constitutes a failure to imagine and perceive the creation as holy. As Berry states clearly, “We are holy creatures living among other holy creatures in a world that is holy.”<sup>14</sup> The world and its creatures are holy not only because they are loved and sustained by God, but also because they are tangible, visible manifestations of God’s love. God’s presence in creation “means that we and all other creatures live by a sanctity that is inexpressibly intimate, for to every creature, the gift of life is a portion of the breath and spirit of God.”<sup>15</sup> Creation is holy because God is present to it by the Holy Spirit and comes to it by the Son in the incarnation. Creation’s holiness is expressed when the relations within creation are healthy and whole, represented for Berry in the image of Sabbath peace, joy, and goodness on the seventh day of creation.

In contrast to this vision of holiness and wholeness is the isolation of the body from its surroundings. Isolating the needs and desires of the human body from its local context, as frequently happens in modern culture, sets the body in conflict with everything else in creation. It becomes a “consumptive machine.”<sup>16</sup> The modern isolation of the body begins, for Berry, with the separation and elevation of the needs of the soul or spirit from those of the body. As our bodies suffer from disuse, our disconnected souls long for a disembodied “salvation.” For Berry, this account ironically suggests that “the true lover of God must not be burdened with any care or respect for His works.”<sup>17</sup> A

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<sup>14</sup> Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 308.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Berry, “The Body and the Earth,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 131.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104.

spirituality that so separates soul from body cannot interact or connect with the material world in any meaningful way, making it ripe for objectification and manipulation by the consumer economy.

Additionally, devaluing one's own body sets the stage for the devaluing all other bodies. Berry notes, "Contempt for the body is invariably manifested in contempt for other bodies – the bodies of slaves, laborers, women, animals, plants, the earth itself."<sup>18</sup> The network upon which bodily value, wholeness, and health depend breaks down. The contempt for bodies – our own and others – leads to violence. Berry states it poignantly,

Violence against one is ultimately violence against all. The willingness to abuse other bodies is the willingness to abuse one's own. To damage the earth is to damage your children. To despise the ground is to despise its fruit; to despise the fruit is to despise its eaters. The wholeness of health is broken by despise.<sup>19</sup>

To isolate and elevate one body above others is a self-defeating exercise. To abuse the earth is to abuse human bodies: if not one's own, then those of one's children. If health seeks wholeness, and wholeness for one comes only through the wholeness of other bodies in one's network, then to care for our bodies is to extend care to those bodies on which our lives depend. There is no such thing as independent or autonomous existence. "Practically," Berry writes, "there is only a distinction between responsible and irresponsible dependence."<sup>20</sup>

Responsible dependence maintains relative harmony with the patterns of the created order. It is a participation in and respect for the holiness of creation. Berry is *not* suggesting that humans can live without any harm to the creation, for "we depend upon

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 107.

other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation.”<sup>21</sup> The use of creation for the purposes of human survival and flourishing cannot be finally avoided. However, he claims, “When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration.”<sup>22</sup> To Berry, every place is holy and beloved because every place is a gift of God’s love and commitment to his creatures. Human work and human economies that destroy the wholeness and health of creation are an affront to the holiness of creation.

Berry’s vision of wholeness seeks a metaphor able to represent visible and invisible connections of interdependence. Although modernity imaginatively likens the body and the mind to machines, Berry find this is a limitedly useful and potentially dangerous metaphor. A machine is self-contained while a human body is not. It relies on air to breath, food to eat, water to drink, microbes for digestion, clothing and shelter for protection, and others for companionship. According to Berry, “The body alone is not, properly speaking, a body,” it is instead, “properly speaking, a cadaver.”<sup>23</sup> As he writes in Sabbath poem II, 2015,

You can divide a bird from its life,  
your blade passing perfectly between.  
But what you have then is not a life  
and a bird....

Life cannot be stopped, its particles  
divided and studied. Though life is

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<sup>21</sup> Berry, “The Gift of Good Land,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 304.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Berry, “Health Is Membership,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 149.

the part of a creature that causes it  
to live, it seems in itself not a part  
but rather a whole in which parts  
of the world for a while participate.<sup>24</sup>

Instead of relying on fuel to run, a body lives through innumerable interactions with other creatures and other bodies.

In contrast to the metaphor of the body as machine, Berry offers the metaphor of the body as *member*. It is a member alongside and within the whole creaturely network that comprises the created order. This metaphor recognizes that healthy human communities are not comprised solely of human members, but non-human creatures as well. Berry writes, “A healthy community is like an ecosystem, and it includes – or makes itself harmoniously a part of – its local ecosystem.”<sup>25</sup> In order to be a healthy human community, the community’s vision of itself must expand to include

a neighborhood of humans in a place, plus the place itself.... If the place is well preserved, if its entire membership, natural and human, is present in it, and if the human economy is in practical harmony with the nature of the place, then the community is healthy.... A healthy community is sustainable; it is, within reasonable limits, self-sufficient and, within reasonable limits, self-determined – that is, free of tyranny.<sup>26</sup>

Membership in a community that is whole gives space to the entire membership, aims for the economic relations of the membership to be in harmony with the local land community, and is sustainable.

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<sup>24</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2016), 54.

<sup>25</sup> Berry, “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 170.

<sup>26</sup> Berry, “Conservation and Local Economy,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 202.

Similarly, elsewhere Berry identifies freedom, pleasure, and sustainability as three standards to judge the health of community: “Freedom (which is pretty much a synonym for personal and local self-sufficiency), pleasure (that is, our gladness to be alive), and longevity or sustainability (by which we signify our wish that human freedom and pleasure may last).”<sup>27</sup> These three depend on the health of the natural world and the health of human culture, a health that is achieved only through a degree of harmony and sympathy between them. And as we will see below and in the following chapters, harmony and sympathy are achieved only through a locally adapted and sympathetic imagination.

#### **4.2.2 Placed Imagination: Perceiving Wholeness and The Eternal Moment**

Imagination, for Berry, is a faculty of perception. He writes, “To imagine is to see most clearly, familiarly, and understandingly with the eyes, but also to see inwardly, with ‘the mind’s eye.’ It is to see actively, with the force of vision and even with visionary force.”<sup>28</sup> The imagination is cultivated through embodied, tangible connections with persons, places, and communities. This is because, in order “for humans to have a responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their places in it.”<sup>29</sup> The love and affection embodied in good work require imagination because imagination connects persons with places, allowing them to see a place “illuminated by its own unique character and by our love for it.”<sup>30</sup> The ability to imagine oneself in a relationship with

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Berry, “It All Turns on Affection,” in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

places and communities in those places enables the development of good work. Disciplined, local practices support the formation of a placed imagination, which encourages sympathy that leads to affection, leading to good work – that is, work locally adapted to place. These links show how practices that cultivate a placed and sympathetic imagination help connect vision to action. Practices and imagination mediate, to use Gunton’s language, between persons and their places, between persons and God via their places.

For Berry, loving and caring for a place requires a locally adapted and sympathetic imagination. As he writes, “you get to mercy by way of imagination, sympathy, tenderness of heart.”<sup>31</sup> A person understands what care and mercy look like in practice only when she loves and knows her place intimately, and she can know a place intimately only when she is able to imagine it fully. Berry quotes Wallace Stevens on the imagination approvingly: “Imagination applied to the whole world is vapid in comparison to imagination applied to a detail.”<sup>32</sup> It is the details or unique particulars that most fully capture our affection and reside within a scale that is intimate enough for us to apply our knowledge and abilities responsibly.

As a faculty of perception, imagination can enable persons to “see” a place more clearly, and to “see” the relationships in that place more clearly. It is important because knowledge is fragmentary and experience is incomplete. To tell the whole story and understand a place “as it is” or could be, one must be able to imagine all that one does

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<sup>31</sup> Berry, “Landsman: Jim Leach in Conversation with Wendell Berry and Tanya Berry,” in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Berry, “It All Turns on Affection,” in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays*, 28.

not know or that one is able to come to know. The defining characteristic of a placed or locally adapted imagination is that it has been submitted to a real place with real needs, problems, and limits.

Explaining why he writes fiction in addition to non-fiction, Berry remarks,

It seems to me that my effort to come to terms in writing with an actual experience has been, every time, an effort to imagine the experience, to see it clear and whole in the mind's eye.... What one actually or provably knows about an actual experience is never complete; it cannot, within the limits of memory or factual records, be made whole. Imagination "completes the picture" by transcending the actual memories and provable facts. For this reason, I have often begun with an actual experience and in an effort to tell a whole story, to see it whole and clear, I have had to imagine more than I have known.<sup>33</sup>

For Berry, the imagination is a mental faculty that enables us to "complete the picture," which is to understand the wholeness of life in the context of limited knowledge and experience. This does not mean that Berry never "makes things up" – he acknowledges that some of his stories originate in factual happenings, while others have been invented whole cloth – but that the stories that Berry seeks to tell through his fiction and poetry are ones that come *from* and speak *to* reality. Imagination helps us to see reality more clearly; it draws us to reality, not away from it.<sup>34</sup>

Imagination, in the "highest" sense, according to Berry, is the "ability *to make real to oneself* the life of one's place or the life of one's enemy."<sup>35</sup> This is to develop the emotional capacity of sympathy. Sympathy allows us to see the wholeness of life in our place or another's place and, in seeing the connections that are invisible to the naked eye, humans are able to both have sympathy for a place and live sympathetically or in

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<sup>33</sup> Berry, "Imagination in Place," in *Imagination in Place*, 3–4.

<sup>34</sup> Berry, "American Imagination and the Civil War," in *Imagination in Place*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Emphasis added.

harmony with the life in a place. The imagination is the means by which “we may see what it was to be Odysseus or Penelope, or David or Ruth, or what it is to be one’s neighbor or one’s enemy. By it, we may ‘see ourselves as other see us.’ It is also the power by which we see the place, the predicament, or the story we are in.”<sup>36</sup> By helping complete the picture, the imagination has the possibility of guiding us outside of our one-sided perspective on the world.

Berry is deeply influenced by the writing and poetry of William Carlos Williams.<sup>37</sup> Williams’s first principle of the imagination, according to Berry and in Williams’ words, is that “to refine, clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force – the imagination.”<sup>38</sup> For Williams, humans are creatures that live in a fleeting “eternal moment,” the convergence of eternity and temporality. The imagination awakens us to this moment, allowing humans to be “not only...vitaly alive, as usually we are not, but also...able to make valid choices about how to live, rather than submitting passively to our commercial degradation.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, perceiving something in the “eternal moment” is to see it in its wholeness and holiness. It is clear that for Williams and Berry the imagination is not merely a passive mirror that humans hold up to nature, but “a changing force.”<sup>40</sup> A properly functioning and disciplined imagination “may reveal to

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<sup>36</sup> Berry, “God, Science, and Imagination,” in *Imagination in Place*, 186–87.

<sup>37</sup> William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) was an American poet contemporary with Eliot and Pound, though one who chose to not to expatriate and instead committed himself to working and writing in his small New Jersey suburb.

<sup>38</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All*, cited in Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 138.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> Berry, “American Imagination and the Civil War,” in *Imagination in Place*, 31.

the artist [or human maker in general] both present circumstance and the work that must be done.”<sup>41</sup> The imagination mediates between vision and action.

In this way, imagination has the “power of making real – of formally realizing, in its momentary presence...our actual experience.”<sup>42</sup> Similar to what was said above regarding the ability to “complete” knowledge, here we recognize how the imagination is able to make real, to concretize, ephemeral human experiences through one’s awareness to them. Imagination is also a mental faculty or realm “in which, *only* in which, the reality of the real is fully recognized. Imagination is the power to see things in their ‘eternal moment’ in which, *only* in which, they are real and we are alive. It is this, the convergence of the eternal and the present, that is possible and that is real only in imagination.”<sup>43</sup> Only through the imagination is one able to perceive the real world of one’s experience. To perceive human experience as real is to position it in relation to eternity and to limits. The human imagination is, therefore, also a human limit, because “we can live in a place only as we have imagined it with a sort of fidelity to itself, or as we have failed to do so.”<sup>44</sup> The human imagination enables humans to experience the world as real and therefore imagine what might really be accomplished in relation to the limits of a specific place.

For Berry, the imagination, however it is described – force, realm, or mental faculty – is not about escapist flights of fancy. The imagination enables us to perceive and act in relation to created reality. All human makers, writes Berry, walk “between two worlds: the world of reality perceived (and by imagination made real) as it immediately is,

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<sup>41</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 139.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. Emphasis in original.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

and the world of an imagined futurity in which the work of ‘composing’ must be done.”<sup>45</sup>

The imagination allows humans to perceive their current reality *and* potential future realities through knowledge of the current moment. The concept of the imagination, here, spans “imagination-as-vision and imagination-as-invention.”<sup>46</sup> “Imagination-as-vision” enables one to perceive the network of relations within a place. “Imagination-as-invention” allows one to realize that vision through various practices of making, including, as is important for Berry, farming and poetry.

Both sides of the human relationship to place – what a maker is doing in the present moment and what she will do in the future – “come under the rule of imagination.”<sup>47</sup> And only through accepting limits – ecological or poetic – can human works aspire to wholeness. As Berry writes, “No human work can become whole by including everything, but it can become whole in another way: by accepting its formal limits and then answering within those limits all the questions it raises.”<sup>48</sup> We will now turn to one such collection of practices that engages limits: works of the arts, with a particular focus on the practice of poetry.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>48</sup> Berry, “Imagination in Place,” in *Imagination in Place*, 3.

### **4.3 Poetry and Art: Cultivating a Sympathetic and Locally Adapted Imagination**

#### **4.3.1 Art as “the Way of Making Things”**

The term “art,” for Berry, refers broadly to “the way of making things.”<sup>49</sup> This includes both the “fine” arts and the “low” arts or crafts: arts of homemaking, placemaking, and farming. All of human culture is included within this definition. In an interview he said, “When I think of art, I think of my home and what I want to live with. Made things can be either degrading or instructive, boring or uplifting. Behind my judgment of art is really a judgment about what kind of community I want to live in.”<sup>50</sup> Made things or works of the arts,<sup>51</sup> according to this line of reasoning, are for the purpose of improving common life together through delighting, instructing, moving, and giving honor to people and places.<sup>52</sup> Quoting the philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy, Berry

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<sup>49</sup> Marilyn Berlin Snell, “The Art of Place: Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, ed. Morris Allen Grubbs (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 53.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>51</sup> I am using the term “works of the arts” as an attempt to do justice to Berry’s broad understanding of art, where art is everything humans do to interact with and change the material order. This term comes from Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2015). Wolterstorff writes, “By ‘an artwork’ I mean a work presented by some art institutions for attentive viewing, listening, or reading, and that by ‘a work of the arts’ I mean a work of one of the traditional fine arts: poetry, fiction, drama, painting, sculpture, music, dance, and architecture” (*ibid.*, 107). Although Wolterstorff limits “a work of the arts” to one of the traditional fine arts (of which poetry is one), Berry would seek to push the term further to include other forms of craft and human making. I use this term to signal that I do not mean a work presented for merely disinterested aesthetic attention; I seek to broaden it beyond the fine arts to include other practices of culture-making that engage humans in the given created order.

<sup>52</sup> Berry writes, “Coomaraswamy says that the mission of art is to delight, instruct, and move. I would add that the best art involves a complex giving of honor. It gives honor to the materials that are being used in the world, therefore giving honor to God; it

emphasizes, “the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist.”<sup>53</sup> All humans are, in this way, artists, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible.

In this age of consumer industrialism, Berry is concerned for the ability of contemporary peoples to make things both useful and beautiful. Useful, for Berry, refers to “language or work that enables seeing, make clarity.”<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, “when a culture is doing well, all its artifacts are made well and afford the kind of solace that only beautiful work can give.... But if our ability to make things has degenerated to the point that we must go to our museums to see art, then we no longer *have* art. Our museum is our mausoleum.”<sup>55</sup> Works of the arts and crafts are products of living and active practices. The quality of a culture can be judged partially on the quality of its art, which as an engagement with the created order requires a locally adapted and sympathetic imagination to execute well.

Poetry, as a way of making or using words, is useful for coming to know and perceive one’s place. What Berry says about fiction could also, here, be applied to poetry: “A writer’s duty, as far as I am concerned, is only to do justice to the subject.”<sup>56</sup> The work

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gives honor to the people for whom the art is made; and it gives honor to the maker, the responsible worker. In that desire to give honor, the artist takes on the obligation to be responsibly connected both to the human community and to nature” (Snell, “The Art of Place: Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, 54).

<sup>53</sup> Marlene Muller and Dennis Vogt, “In the Service of Hope - a Conversation with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, ed. Morris Allen Grubbs (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 201.

<sup>54</sup> Holly M. Brockman, “How Can a Family “Live at the Center of Its Own Attention”? An Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, ed. Morris Allen Grubbs (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 181.

<sup>55</sup> Snell, “The Art of Place: Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Muller and Vogt, “In the Service of Hope - a Conversation with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, 211.

of a poet as an attentive member of a community is to work “in the hope of using, correcting so far as we are able, and passing on the art of human life, of human flourishing, which includes the arts of reading and writing poetry.”<sup>57</sup>

### **4.3.2 The Poetic Imagination and Particularizing Place**

As imagination seeks to tell a whole story or to give perspective to the complex wholeness of a place or event, Berry argues, “it follows that a work of art must not be an illusion of reality. The artist must not ‘plagiarize’ from nature. To do so – to paint as an illusion of ‘reality’ a scene or a view – it so make a thing that is by nature fragmentary.”<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Berry explains, the painter “Cézanne was not painting exactly what he saw, and he was not painting what he dreamed up; he was painting an imagined world that was parallel to the world he was looking at. Between those two worlds, the imagined and the real, there are points of contact, so that one is somehow the measure of the other.”<sup>59</sup> To paint exactly what one sees, without the “completing” assistance of the imagination, may involve great artistic skill but is to paint only the fragmentation of reality. On the other hand, to paint what one has “dreamed up” would be to paint only fantasy. The relationship between works of the arts and the imagination that interests Berry is one in which reality and imagination inform one another, complete one another, perhaps change one another. Art – as both practice and object – is “realized imagination.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Berry, “Sweetness Preserved,” in *Imagination in Place*, 88.

<sup>58</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 153.

<sup>59</sup> Katherine Dalton, “Again in Affection: An Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, ed. Morris Allen Grubbs (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 191.

<sup>60</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 159.

For Williams and, I contend, for Berry as well, “art is an imitation of the *processes* or creativity of nature,” not a reproduction of the creatures in nature.<sup>61</sup> Williams, in *Spring and All*, writes that an artist such as Cézanne “escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation” – that is to say a creature in addition to other creatures – with the power to ‘stand between man and nature as saints once stood between man and the sky.’”<sup>62</sup> The goal is not for works of the arts to repeat or image nature like a mirror, but to imagine reality in such a way as to make a *new* creature – a new painting or poem or story that has integrity and wholeness according to its form.<sup>63</sup> A work of the arts informed by a locally adapted and sympathetic imagination mediates faithfully between humans and the order of creation, potentially creating new links in the network of creation or healing existing ruptures.

Poetry, an example of human engagement with creation, is a particularizing artistic practice “under the rule of imagination.” Composing poetry, for both Williams and Berry, is a way of making and of being engaged with a place that “is the means of giving to realizations of the fleeting eternal moment a kind of permanent presence.”<sup>64</sup> Each brief moment in time is brimming with an “ever-accumulating mass of details” that can be discerned, ordered, and imagined – made real – through poetic form.<sup>65</sup> Once given a “permanent presence” through poetry, the mass of details can be returned to again and again, “as reminders of an indispensable possibility, a wakefulness, belonging to

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 154. Emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

the highest definition of our humanity.”<sup>66</sup> Poetry, through its highly concentrated and memorable forms, attends to the “eternal moment” in order to “refine, clarify, and intensify” the significance of human experience and vocation, to perceive a place’s wholeness or lack thereof.

Through clarifying the “eternal moment,” works of the arts have the power “to *place* us imaginatively, and therefore effectively, in our lives and in our local whereabouts. And so [Williams’s] concerns about art always have a dimension that is practical and ethical. Art is different from nature and, because contained within it, is subordinate to it.”<sup>67</sup> This imaginative placement is particularizing. For Berry, works of the arts in general and poetry in particular are imaginative human engagements with creation that are able to help us see, understand, and therefore dwell faithfully in our particular place. Thus, the goal of artistic practice is not to “plagiarize” nature but to perceive built and non-built environments and local communities in such a way that offers a vision of wholeness leading to an ethic of appropriate action. Although no work of the arts can be fully whole or satisfy the impulse towards wholeness, the imagination, combined with memory, attention, and knowledge, can offer a more “complete” vision.<sup>68</sup>

Berry is attracted to the way that for Williams, “imagination is a particularizing and a local force, native to the ground underfoot. If that ground is not a great cultural center, but only in a New Jersey suburb, so be it.”<sup>69</sup> Berry aspires, like Williams, to write

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>68</sup> Dalton, “Again in Affection: An Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, 188.

<sup>69</sup> Berry, “American Imagination and the Civil War,” in *Imagination in Place*, 32. Williams lived, worked, and wrote in Rutherford, a small New Jersey suburb.

poetry that is “native to the ground underfoot.” He has spent decades observing, walking, working, and loving his small, marginal place in Kentucky, submitting his hopes, dreams, and imagination to the limits of that place. Berry lives into his place through his image of it. He writes,

To preserve our places and to be at home in them, it is necessary to fill them with imagination. To imagine as well as see what is in them. Not to fill them with the junk of fantasy and unconsciousness, for that is no more than the industrial economy would do, but to see them first clearly with the eyes, and then to see them with the imagination in their sanctity, as belonging to the Creation. To imagine the place as it is, and was, and – *only then* – as it will or may be. To imagine its human life only in harmony with its nonhuman life – as one, only one of its possibilities. In that imagining, perhaps we may begin to see it in its sacredness, as unimaginable gift, as mystery – as it was, is, and ever shall be, world without end.<sup>70</sup>

The wholeness inherent in a place is always more complex than humans can understand. Our knowledge of our place is always incomplete. Therefore our places must be “completed” through our imagination in order to be particularized. Imagination mediates this human engagement with place. If a place is filled “with the junk of fantasy,” humans interact with the place on this assumption.

Intentionally seeking to perceive a place as holy, sacred, and gift potentially changes the character of one’s interaction with that place. Berry seeks a locally adapted, placed, and sympathetic imagination formed, in part, through a locally adapted practice of poetry, so that he might perceive his place as God’s holy creation. Then he organizes his work and household economy in ways that are in harmony with his place “as it is,” not as he might wish it was. Poetry is for Berry, as we will see below, a tool to truly live into his place, to become native to his particular piece of land.

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<sup>70</sup> Wendell Berry, “Notes: Unspecializing Poetry,” in *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983), 90–91.

### 4.3.3 “Elaboration of Elegance”: Living Within Limits

According to Berry, artists – more than scientists – have struggled seriously and faithfully with the issue of limits. He writes, “For an art does not propose to enlarge itself by limitless extension, but rather to enrich itself within bounds that are accepted prior to the work.”<sup>71</sup> These limits are often arbitrary or artificial: a painting of such and such size, a sonnet with fourteen lines, a play of five acts, a hymn with four verses. The materials themselves often impose limits to how they can be used. For example, egg tempera will crack if painted on canvas instead of a hard surface. Yet within and because of these externally or internally imposed limits, “artists achieve elaborations of pattern, of sustaining relationships of parts with one another and with the whole that may be astonishingly complex.”<sup>72</sup> The size of a canvas or length of a poem does not determine quality. Limits are not necessarily oppressive but can be liberating and generative.<sup>73</sup>

Works of the arts, and by analogy other forms of human making, are, for Berry, an “elaboration of elegance.”<sup>74</sup> One example of how Berry adheres to poetic form in his non-Sabbath poetry is the poem, “Spring Haiku.” As its title implies, this poem takes the form of a *haiku*, an impressionistic Japanese poem. English haikus typically consist of three

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<sup>71</sup> Wendell Berry, “Faustian Economics,” in *What Matters?: Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>73</sup> Although artists tend to improve their craft the longer they practice, there is no guarantee that the next poem or dance will be better than the previous one. In contrast to scientific experimentation that expects progress beyond every prior experiment, Berry writes, the arts never imply or seek any “limitless sequence of works.... No work of art is necessarily followed by a second work that is necessarily better” (*ibid.*, 52).

<sup>74</sup> Wendell Berry, “Standing by Words,” in *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983), 51.

phrases of three lines, the first and third of which have five syllables and the second line has seven.

### Spring Haiku

1.

One young wild plum tree  
White in the bare woods, a bride  
Among wedding guests.

2.

Mayapples: a crowd  
Hidden under umbrellas  
In the falling rain.

3.

The lilac blossoms  
All suddenly are fallen –  
How bright a shadow!<sup>75</sup>

Although there are limited examples of this form in Berry's poetic corpus,<sup>76</sup> "Spring Haiku" follows the haiku form both technically – it comprises three phrases of 5-7-5 and each phrase is internally sufficient – and thematically – it contemplates a particular season in nature, spring, by juxtaposing two images in each phrase. It likens a plum tree to a bride, mayapples to a crowd, and fallen lilac blossoms to a shadow. The images in this poem are suggestive and memorable, capturing an entire scene and evoking a mood in just a few words.

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<sup>75</sup> Wendell Berry, *Given: New Poems* (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), 5.

<sup>76</sup> Another one, "And I Beg Your Pardon," is brief and delightfully witty (Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 376):

The first mosquito:  
Come here and I will kill thee  
Holy though thou art

The limits of the haiku's form, under Berry's pen, do not stifle his poetic voice, although his poetic line is often lyrically much freer and variable. Switching to prose and giving us more details about the plum tree and the surrounding forest would not necessarily describe the scene better; most likely, more technical details would make it forgettable or mundane. Berry accepted the limits of this form of poetry as a gift, as creating space for an "elaboration of elegance." The limits of poetic form offer a way to say something that can be said only *in that way*.

Berry applies the idea of "elaboration of elegance" to farming and marriage through the analogy of form. To be human is to live with limits – external and internal, biological, cultural, and ecological. Place, as his comments on farming reveal, is a limit for both the farmer and the poet. We will now turn to the analogies Berry sees between marriage, farming, and poetry to better understand the importance of limits.

#### 4.3.3.1 *Analogies of Form: Marriage, Farming, and Poetry*

Inherent in the concept of form, for Berry, is the need for limits. In his non-fiction essays Berry often compares farming to marriage. It is unsurprising, then – since the analogy between farming and marriage highlights the need for limits, fidelity, and affection – that Berry would also compare marriage and farming to the practice of poetry. Poetry, as Berry imagines it, is one practice contextualized within a whole association of complex practices of limit, fidelity, and affection that encourage good work for the wellbeing of the membership in that place. Poetry, like farming, connects you to a real place. In poetry, as with marriage, the form precedes you; it is a promise you live into and from.

Form in this sense stands in contrast to formlessness, which is “neither civilized nor natural. It is a peculiarly human evil, without analogue in nature.... It is neither a house nor a field nor a forest, but rather a war or strip mine, where the balance between stability and change has been overthrown.”<sup>77</sup> Farming, marriage, and poetry are similar in that they are all formal disciplines and, in being formal disciplines, their forms resonate with one another. Formal disciplines are concerned with how things – words, persons, and places – are joined together. They seek coherence and order, but not stasis. As Berry writes, “Forms join the diverse things that they contain; they join their contents to their context; they join us to themselves; they join us to each other; they join writers and readers; they join the generations together, the young and the old, the living and the dead.”<sup>78</sup> Formal disciplines, then, are relational structures.

Because of the resonance between forms, when Berry is writing about marriage, he is also writing, analogously, of poetry and farming, and when speaking about farming, he is analogously speaking about marriage and poetry. We will begin by examining Berry’s remarks on the analogies between poetry and marriage, but again, as we will find in the following section on poetry and farming, he is also always writing about farming.

In 1982, just a few years after Berry began writing his Sabbath poems, he wrote an essay entitled “Poetry and Marriage.” In this essay, he notes that poetry and marriage are formal analogs in at least two ways. First, these forms are ways “of making or acting or doing, which is to some extent technical.”<sup>79</sup> Boundaries and limits are acknowledged before a poem or a marriage begins. Second, these forms are “an opening, a generosity,

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<sup>77</sup> Berry, “The Specialization of Poetry,” in *Standing by Words*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Berry, “Poetry and Marriage,” in *Standing by Words*, 105.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

toward possibility. The forms acknowledge that good is possible; they hope for it, await it, and prepare its welcome – although they dare not *require* it.”<sup>80</sup> Set forms require both the limits of the form and the hope in the good of upholding the limits of the form. To give up one is to give up the other.

By “form,” Berry has in mind “*set* forms – that is, forms that in a sense *precede* the content, that are in a sense *prescriptive*.”<sup>81</sup> Set forms are both flexible and orderly. In this way they are “indispensable,” serving “that part of our life which is cyclic, drawing minds and lives back repeatedly through the same patterns, as each year moves through the same four seasons in the same order.”<sup>82</sup> That is to say, set forms offer order and structure to the complexities of living. “To have a life or a place or a poem that is formless – into which anything at all may, or may not, enter – is to be condemned, at best, to bewilderment.”<sup>83</sup> Forms give life boundaries and expectations from which to set out, plan, and live.

In being prescriptive, set forms also offer external standards from which to judge the quality of and faithfulness to the form – a sonnet has fourteen lines; a marriage (in the Judeo-Christian tradition) is between two persons. Form offers criteria of discrimination; it “is the means by which error is recognized and the means by which correctness is

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Emphasis in original.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* This is also how marriage and farming are analogous forms, as we will see in the following section.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. Berry shows at the end of this essay that this analogy is expansive enough to include not only set poetic forms but also free verse. He likens free verse to courtship instead of marriage. “[Whitman] set his line free only to make it into a *kind* of line that we recognize anywhere we see it – a new power, a new music, added to poetry, which can be learned and used” (*ibid.*, 104).

recognized.”<sup>84</sup> A poem is not a sonnet if it has more than fourteen lines of highly structured verse. It may still be a poem, but not in the form of a sonnet. A marriage where one or both persons are sexually unfaithful may still be a marriage in the legal sense, but not the formal sense. The form judges these actions as unfaithful to the marriage and calls both persons back to renew the pattern of the form.

Forms stand before and over against their content, summoning one “into a poem, or into a life, its unforeseen belongings, and thus is not rigid but freeing – an invitation to unknown possibility.”<sup>85</sup> Set forms, as invitations, require faith and hope in the form. As Berry writes, “One puts down the first line of the pattern *in trust* that life and language are abundant enough to complete it.”<sup>86</sup> That is to say, when one begins a marriage or a poem, one cannot predict the ending or the journey. What both forms ask is for one to “stay and find out” – stay and find out where the poem leads, how the broken marriage may continue.

To “stay and find out” is an act of fidelity and an act of hope. Berry writes, “To keep the form is an act of faith in possibility, not of the form, but of the life that is gen to it; the form is a question addressed to life and time, which only life and time can answer.”<sup>87</sup> All forms are creaturely and therefore fallen. Forms are kept and broken by fallen humans. But, when “understood seriously enough, a form is a way of accepting and of living within the limits of creaturely life.”<sup>88</sup> By accepting a set form, in either poetry or marriage, is to accept a form that is never of one’s own design. It is to accept limits.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 97. Emphasis in original.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 93.

Marriage invites and requires fidelity to not only a person, but to a pattern of limits inherent in the form of marriage. Faithfulness to the form is not, however, merely a matter of duty. It is also a matter of hope. Berry is clear that faith in set forms expects that the faithful will “not stay to find that they should not have stayed.”<sup>89</sup> This is decidedly not optimism in the happiness of marriages or the sufficiency of love; he is clear that not everything we learn by staying is happy. Instead, “the faith, rather, is that by staying, and only by staying we will learn something of the truth, that the truth is good to know, and that it is always both different and larger than we thought.”<sup>90</sup> Only by living within limits, within forms, do humans have the chance – only a chance, never a guarantee – to discover goodness in and truth of this created life.

The fidelity to set forms also requires good work, which itself requires time. Berry notes that commitment to set forms requires not only hard work but also *good* work, “The religious disciple, the husband and wife, the poet, like the true husbandman, accept the duration and effort, even the struggle, of formal commitment. They must come prepared to stay; if they mean to stay they will have to work, and they must learn the difference between good work and bad.”<sup>91</sup> Like work on a farm, one will know whether work is

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 98. What Berry is *not* saying is that everyone who stays faithful to the form of marriage to the end will be glad they stayed or learn that they should have stayed. Nor is he insinuating that those who leave broken or abusive marriages should have “stayed to find out” – indeed, an abusive marriage is a prime example of unfaithfulness to the form of marriage. What he is saying is that the *form* of marriage assumes that there is good in the act of staying. Again, this is not a judgment on individual marriages – Berry writes elsewhere that he would and has supported friends’ divorces – but a discussion of the expectations of form and why one would submit to the limits of the form.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

good or bad only from its consequence, and to know the consequences one must stick around long enough to see the results of actions.

In the last quotation the analogy between marriage and poetry has come back around to an analogy with farming. Farming requires formal commitment, that is, fidelity to and respect of limits. Farming, like marriage, says, “Stay and find out.” Stay and learn what can and cannot be done within the limits of this place. Stay and learn how this place can be whole. Stay and learn the types of farming practices that can lead to healing and wholeness. Stay and become a member.

Berry is clear in his essays that he is both a farmer and a writer, a farmer-poet. Not one and then the other, but both together. The two vocations cannot be separated and remain “resistant to any kind of simplification. It is an experience of what I will go ahead and call complexification.”<sup>92</sup> As a farmer-poet he has accepted the limit and particularity of his land as an influence for his farming practices and his writing practices.

Particularizing work, the character of work that Berry has sought to practice as a farmer, “calls for an exactly particularizing language. This is the right kind of language for a writer, a language developing, so to speak, from the ground up.”<sup>93</sup> One cannot learn to farm from merely reading books or looking at diagrams, but only through farming itself. And the practices of farming require one to speak clearly about their particularities. Farming and poetry are formal analogues where “the ability to speak exactly is intimately related to the ability to know exactly.”<sup>94</sup> In order to speak correctly about his place, Berry must attend to the details and unique particularities of it. Conversely, only through

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<sup>92</sup> Berry, “Imagination in Place,” in *Imagination in Place*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

attempting to speak and write clearly about these details does he come to know his place, to know what it looks like to be a faithful member of it.

Poetry, like farming, is a practice that helps one, in the words of philosopher Edward Casey, “get into place” or to become, like the goal of Williams, locally adapted.<sup>95</sup> Each place, each piece of land is irreducibly and complexly itself. Particularizing work, that is to say, good work, is like art in that it “attempts to do justice to its subject.” For a farmer-poet, understanding that work – good work or bad work – will impact and potentially change your land and community also leads you to question how your writing will affect your place.<sup>96</sup> The health of the land itself is the standard to judge the propriety of farming practices, as well as writing practices.

Berry believes that neither poetry nor farming should be undertaken at the expense of a place. Neither should look upon the place and its people as “raw material,” waiting to be used or exploited.<sup>97</sup> Instead, “any made thing should be made in harmony with its sources, and all things so made will have much in common.”<sup>98</sup> Farming and poetry, as analogous forms, seek a form of wholeness and connection with the land and its people, connecting the practitioner to the place through the good work of farming and

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<sup>95</sup> See Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>96</sup> Berry, “Imagination in Place,” in *Imagination in Place*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Agribusiness is the obvious example for extractive agricultural practice. The example Berry uses for writing is when authors lack knowledge of actual country people and substitute knowledge for stereotype, a country character that come “slouching into the universe with his pistol in one hand, his prong in another, his Bible in another, his bottle in another, his grandpappy’s cavalry sword in another, his plug of chewing tobacco in another. This does harm” (Wendell Berry, “Tilling Word and Land: How Place Informs Both Mind and Imagination,” *Sojourners Magazine* Nov 2005, 22).

<sup>98</sup> Gregory McNamee and James R. Hepworth, “The Art of Living Right: An Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, ed. Morris Allen Grubbs (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 19–20.

writing. Good work in farming and writing will attend closely to the way things really are as well as to how they should or could be. A vision of health, wholeness, and holiness on a farm or in a poem requires imagination and inspiration in addition to observation and perception, because “imagination knows more than the eye sees, and inspiration, which you can only hope and pray for.”<sup>99</sup>

Much of Berry’s non-fiction writing is devoted to creating an agri-*culture* that is locally adapted, sustainable, and ecologically harmonious. This work requires good farming practices. Perhaps unsurprisingly by this point, Berry also believes that the survival of our culture also depends “on our ability to supply to the feeling of reverence the arts necessary for its enactment. Poetry and farming have to be counted equally as two of the necessary arts.”<sup>100</sup> Poetry, as an art “under the rule of imagination,” is one way to help individuals become locally adapted to their places. Even those who will never farm and may never be married can take up analogous practices of limit and commitment.<sup>101</sup>

#### **4.3.4 The Craft of Poetry: Formal, Memorable, and Musical**

According to Berry, the medium of poetry is formal, memorable, and musical. First, poetry is a formal medium – in the sense discussed in the previous section: it is concerned with how things are joined together – with two foundational principles. Principle a) “When what is to be said has been said, stop.” And principle b) “Say only

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<sup>99</sup> Berry, “Tilling Word and Land: How Place Informs Both Mind and Imagination,” 24.

<sup>100</sup> Berry, “My Friend Hayden,” in *Imagination in Place*, 68.

<sup>101</sup> Berry, and those who are influenced by him – for example Norman Wirzba and Fred Bahnson – have suggested that one practice to cultivate the sorts of virtues, sensibilities, and affections that are necessary to care for place is *gardening*, to which poetry as described here is analogically similar.

what needs to be said.”<sup>102</sup> These are economic principles; a poem has no superfluous elements. A good poem – like a good field – is beautiful when “accomplished with an exacting sense of *enough*.”<sup>103</sup> This entails awareness of the limits of line and measure – measure both in the sense of rhythm and syllable and as “carefully considered.”<sup>104</sup> Like a farm, a poem has a definite “carrying capacity” beyond which “the poem stumbles or breaks down.”<sup>105</sup> A line is “in measure” when it is economic and eloquent. Berry and Williams’s sense of economy and measure is only partially technical; also crucial are respect and propriety for the subject matter. The manner of expression must be appropriate to and respectful of the subject. A good, beautiful poem is subject to both internal and external limits.

Second, closely related to the economic form of poetry is its memorability. This is true for Berry in at least three senses. A) Due to its brevity, the quality of poetic verse relies on memorability of words and phrases, metaphors and images, events and insight. B) The second sense of memorability is the sense of “being remembered.” Berry believes that poetry “may act as a discriminating threshold, admitting only what is worth remembering.”<sup>106</sup> Through the poetic craft of making memorable phrases, images, and insights, the poetic subject is remembered. For Berry this is both a communal and filial

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<sup>102</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 89.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. Emphasis added.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>106</sup> Berry, “Notes: Unspecializing Poetry,” in *Standing by Words*, 86. Elsewhere he writes, “A poem, too, may remind poet and reader alike of what is remembered or ought to be remembered – as in elegies, poems of history, love poems, celebrations of nature, poems of praise or worship, or poems as prayers” (Wendell Berry, “The Responsibility of the Poet,” in *What Are People For?* (Washington, D.C.; London, U.K.: Counterpoint, 2010), 89).

responsibility. All art exists within a complex conversation between present and past: “Any poem worth the name is a product of a conversation. It exists, literally, by recalling past voices into presence.”<sup>107</sup> This remembering through causing to be memorable is one way that poetry preserves and reveals the truth about the world. And this obligation – both to reveal and remember the truth – preserves and enables the public, the readers of such poetry, “to clarify the possibility of *responsible* action.”<sup>108</sup> C) Responsible action, seeking wholeness and a literal “re-remembering” of the created order, is the third sense of memorable. Thus for Berry, poetry is both cause and effect, through poetic technique of memorability it makes truth available and supports the possibility of faithful action in the world. This is how poetry is integrally related to the world.

Third, poetry is a musical medium and “rhythm is the fundamental musical principle of poetry.”<sup>109</sup> “Without music,” Berry writes, “vision or power or revelation or honesty or intelligence or learning or fact or shocking fact may be of interest but will not make a poem.”<sup>110</sup> A poem’s expressiveness, its rhythm comes from “the play of line against line and of sentence against sentence” and “the interplay of line and sentence.”<sup>111</sup> Berry notes that part of what distinguishes poetry from prose is that it is written in lines. The end of a line of poetry is not often coterminous with the end of a sentence. Thus the play between lines and sentences gives poetry its music, its rhythm. For Berry, “the line...has the character of music, and the sentence or syntax the character of sense.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Berry, “The Specialization of Poetry,” in *Standing by Words*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 104.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 74.

Strong poems are those in which line and sentence are balanced and of equal importance. Poetry is shaped, measured, and ordered by this interplay.

The rhythm of a line of poetry is not found strictly in the number of syllables – “it is not hard to find two perfectly iambic lines...that have different rhythms.”<sup>113</sup> Rhythm is the beat and tempo with which one reads a poem, it helps set the mood of a poem, while pace and cadence give meaning and sense to the lines and sentences. Berry writes that scansion (the practice of determining the metrical pattern of a line, e.g., iambic) is little help to readers, “To a reader, a poem will be rhythmically coherent or not.”<sup>114</sup> The issue of rhythm is important because it contributes to *how* a poem means what it says; a poem means not only what it says – in the “character of sense,” in the syntax of the sentence – but it means how it says what it says. The latter is the “character of music.”

Rhythm is also a key element of poetry for Berry because a work of the arts is a creature. Rhythm is a creaturely characteristic, one that is responsive. For example, the beating of a healthy heart is not constant like a machine in a hospital. A healthy heart responds to its ecologic environment, the body’s activity, and mind’s emotional state. The rhythm of a poem should, likewise, be responsive because “the rhythms of the creaturely world are living, sensitive, responsive, and under influence. Everything in the creaturely world is under the influence of something else, and ultimately everything else.”<sup>115</sup> The rhythms of poetry resonate with external rhythms and perhaps make the reader more aware of them.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 103.

Economic, memorable, and musical elements of the craft of poetry work together with content and develop sympathetically in relation to place. It is clear from his writing that poetic form in Berry's sense "is not a vessel to be filled, such as a bowl.... Instead, form and content grow together, are "fleshed out" in the course of happening."<sup>116</sup> Locally adapted poetry is a practice that relies on embodied experience and knowledge of a place such that the imagination is able to faithfully render an impression of a place or event.

#### ***4.4 Poetry and Ethics: the Imaginative Process of Local Adaption***

##### **4.4.1 Purposes of Poetry**

Poetry, as Berry understands it, does not exist "for its own sake" but for the sake of creation's wholeness. It is a formal discipline and, through various formal resonances in creation, "the poet affirms and collaborates in the formality of Creation."<sup>117</sup> It is a tool and a practice that allows one to participate in and hopefully heal or maintain the patterns of wholeness in creation. Human culture, work, and art all exists within nested patterns in creation and are subject to its limits. "A work of art," Berry writes, "which accepts this condition, and exists upon its terms, honors the Creation, and so becomes a part of it."<sup>118</sup> Through the practice of poetry, humans can become part of creation's wholeness by seeking local adaption, existing as a link of health instead of disease. Thus the subject of Berry's poetry is not humans alone, nature alone, or God alone. Instead, his

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>117</sup> Wendell Berry, "The Responsibility of the Poet," in *What Are People For?* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 89.

<sup>118</sup> Berry, "Notes: Unspecializing Poetry," in *Standing by Words*, 85.

poetry “is concerned with the order that makes possible the conviviality of the three.”<sup>119</sup> Poetry is a creature that, in being composed, reflects on the true order of creation, which is to always see material creation in light of its “eternal aspect,” that is, its relational status with the Creator. Poetry “cannot pretend that we live in Paradise or in Hell; by definition, it must be a product of the land eastward of Eden.”<sup>120</sup> But poetry is also a creation of fallen humans who exists in a world where, as Sabbath poem IX, 1999 reminds us, the “The incarnate Word is with us, / is still speaking, is present / always,” and poetry can participate in this reality by attending to creation’s wholeness.<sup>121</sup>

Since poetry is intended to serve a truth greater than itself, a poet “serves the poem with his or her whole life, not just with ‘talent,’ observation, ideas, verbal gifts, and so on.”<sup>122</sup> To be a poet is not only to write poetry that discovers, understands, celebrates, and remembers the truth, but also to live into that truth through locally adapted action and good work. As Berry writes, “When we make our art we are also making our lives, and I am sure that the reverse is equally true.”<sup>123</sup> To make is to live and to live is to make; the quality of each will be reflected in the other.

Poetry, as mentioned above, is *useful*. Recall that, for Berry, something is useful when it is “language or work that enables seeing, make clarity.”<sup>124</sup> Poetry, like the particularizing work of farming, is a tool Berry uses to connect himself to his land and his

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 203.

<sup>122</sup> Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *Standing by Words*, 114.

<sup>123</sup> Berry, “In Memory: James Baker Hall,” in *Imagination in Place*, 113.

<sup>124</sup> Brockman, “How Can a Family “Live at the Center of Its Own Attention”?” An Interview with Wendell Berry,” in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, 181.

work to his place. He writes approvingly of the use of poetry as “an instrument by which man may arrive in his place and maintain himself there.”<sup>125</sup> It helps him be wakeful to the possible experiences with others in the membership. One of the poets who influenced this perspective was William Carlos Williams, to whom we now turn to clarify the theme of local adaption.

#### **4.4.2 William Carlos Williams: A Paradigmatic Poet of Local Adaption**

Berry believes that “the highest earthly result of imagination is probably local adaptation,”<sup>126</sup> a central theme in many of his essays on poetry and farming. Berry’s paradigm for poetic local adaptation is the American poet William Carlos Williams (1883–1963). Although little appreciated by the critics in his lifetime, Williams is, for Berry, a key influence. In describing Williams, Berry writes: “Of all the writers known to me, Williams dealt most directly and explicitly with the complex cultural necessity of an ongoing, lively connection between imagination in the highest sense and the ground underfoot.”<sup>127</sup> Williams’s poetry artfully linked the “eternal moment” with “the ground underfoot,” allowing him to both adapt to his place “as it is” and to perceive its particularity in relation to God.

William Carlos Williams was both a doctor and a poet. After completing his medical training in pediatrics, he returned to his hometown of Rutherford, NJ to open a general medicine practice there in 1912. Unlike many poets of his generation – such as T.

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<sup>125</sup> Berry as cited in Luke Schlueter, “Earth and Flesh Sing Together: The Place of Wendell Berry’s Poetry in His Vision of the Human,” in *The Humane Vision of Wendell Berry*, ed. Mark T. and Nathan Schlueter Mitchell (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2011), 239.

<sup>126</sup> Berry, “American Imagination and the Civil War,” in *Imagination in Place*, 34.

<sup>127</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 177.

S. Eliot and Ezra Pound – Williams was a locally committed American poet, both to a local place and to a local American idiom. Berry’s recent book, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, attempts to witness to Williams’ influence on Berry’s life and poetry. Most influential on Berry is Williams’s lifelong attempt to write poetry that honored the “mass of details” of his local community and place.

Berry writes that he himself “had first thought of becoming a writer because of [his] belief that my native place and neighborhood had given [him] knowledge worthy of writing.”<sup>128</sup> The problem with this is that for the majority of literary critics and publishers of the time, the only subject matter of importance was “the city.” Berry read few if any examples in school of poets that were consciously loyal to their home place. One thing that Williams’s poetry provided Berry was an example of a poet who stayed put, who made an effort to conform his language and his thoughts to his local place and his community. He thus exemplifies a poet who was locally adapted to his place.

Local adaption is “an issue of history, culture, and geography to which poetry is subordinate though necessary.”<sup>129</sup> Local adaption is about finding out *where* one is in relation to one’s place, seeing its holiness, and learning to live there in ways that respect the entirety of its membership. Poetry can enable one to become native to a place and is a artistic practice with which one must struggle to adapt to the local. Williams, as a poet of local adaption, helped Berry to classify his own poetic project as such and “to see [poetry]

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

not as an end in itself but as a part of a necessary, if never finished or finishable, effort to belong authentically where my life had put me.”<sup>130</sup>

Although Williams was an urbanite and Berry is a countryman, the way Williams’s poetry closely attended to the particularities of his place allowed his work to resonate in Berry’s life, fitting “not so much the place as my imagination and my need in that place.”<sup>131</sup> Williams, in forming his poetic imagery and poetic language so neatly to the details of his place, offered Berry an approach and method that he could adapt to the relationship between him and his rural place. In submitting his art to his place, Williams’s poetry was able to speak into another’s poetic relationship with his place.

Williams was seeking throughout his life a “credible language” to describe, know, and participate in the community in and around Rutherford.<sup>132</sup> As the local doctor, he was a citizen of the community and his neighbors were his patients. His poetry attests to the intimacy of his knowledge and relationships with these people, and to his interest in local life, which spanned the sentiments of affection, amusement, and dismay.<sup>133</sup> Berry describes how Williams “kept trying to extend the reach and comprehensiveness of his art, and so to make a language ‘to reconcile / the people and the stones.’”<sup>134</sup> He was a poet concerned with the “mass of local details,” which included his daily medical practice, the local geography, community and economy, and the onslaught of industrialism.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* Reconciling “the people and the stones” is a very apt description of much of Berry’s own poetic output, particularly his desire to reconcile himself and his farming practices to the land and the surrounding woods.

The issue of finding a “credible language” is a matter not only of expression but propriety; it is the issue of using a *local* idiom and speech, one that spoke appropriately not only *of* the place but also *from* and *to* the place. In the face of the details of a place, Williams needed a language common to and with his subject to do justice to his subject. This, according to Berry, “was a task of enormous difficulty,” one that Williams acknowledged and accepted.<sup>135</sup> In committing to place and to its “mass of local details,” Williams forced “himself to learn...that the condition of the place, its *health* in the fullest sense, was necessarily one of the measures of the quality of the work that was done in it.”<sup>136</sup> This is the process of local adaption, of becoming native to a place, which was so influential for Berry’s own work.

Thus, attending to the local idiom and honoring the mass of local details involves the process of ordering or measuring: “discrimination (What are the significant details? What, so far as you can see, *is* their significance?), coherence (How, so far as you can see, do the details relate to one another?), and art or ‘invention’ (What are the means of making in a poem a coherence analogous to, and revealing, the actual coherence of the details, as far as you can see?).”<sup>137</sup> Discrimination, coherence, and invention are three elements of locally adapted, poetic language that address the concern for significance, relationality, and craft. Through the craft or invention of poetry, one gives meaning and coherence to the particulars of a local place. The poet submits her language and craft to the place, instead of expecting the place to submit to her language or form.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. Williams’ task was complicated by its rejection of the prevailing poetic norm – expatriation and the “freedom” from place that it gave – that left him, in an important sense, without peers.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–30. Emphasis in original.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. Emphasis in original.

According to Berry, for Williams “the imagination was by definition embodied.”<sup>138</sup> As both a doctor and a poet, Williams did not separate life and work. His work was reflected in the embodiedness of his poetry. In one of his poems Williams writes: “Say it! No ideas but in things.”<sup>139</sup> Berry takes this phrase – “No ideas but in things” – to sum up Williams’s approach to the art of poetry, his manifesto.<sup>140</sup> This phrase does not reject thoughts per se, but only disembodied thoughts or abstractions. Williams embraced things – his place and the people and objects there in – as a limit for his art. Berry writes, “To imagine, to speak of and for, the things, persons, and places by which we actually live is to break the carapace of official identity and general location.”<sup>141</sup> It is to speak of and thus speak for what we stand on. This embodied and locally adapted imagination necessitates attending to the careful *craft* of poetry, to which we now turn.

#### **4.4.3 Propriety of Language and Propriety of Place**

Berry is quite insistent – in his three books about writing and poetry, *Standing By Words*, *Imagination in Place*, and *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, and various interviews and essays – that poets and artists are not some peculiar or unique kind of being. As mentioned above, all humans are artists and makers, whether good or bad, faithful or unfaithful. Railing against the “poet interview” genre, which he sees as a symptom of “othering” the poet, he argues that the subject of poetry is not words or the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 56.

mind of the poet but what poets *have in common with others*.<sup>142</sup> The subject of poetry is the world of reality. Poets should seek in their poetry “a point of clarification or connection between themselves and the world on one hand and between themselves and their readers on the other.”<sup>143</sup> Poetry is not “a seeking of self in words, the making of a world-world in which the word-self may be at home.”<sup>144</sup> Although a poem has integrity and is a creature seeking wholeness, it is not a work of the arts written “for its own sake.” A poet has a responsibility to both the poem’s readers and the poem’s subjects. The place and the membership therein judge the poem, weigh it against reality and potentiality.

Poetry calls for appropriate language and poetic forms that lead us to reality, to actual local places and communities, and enable readers to imagine reality’s wholeness and sanctity. Poetry is not pulled from the depths of the poet’s soul, but emerges from a form of life that is engaged with the world and all of its members. In this respect, the formal analogies between farming, marriage, and poetry witness to Berry’s concern to overcome the contemporary divorce between art and life, culture and work. This is poetry, literally, from the ground up.

As an essayist, novelist, and poet, Berry is concerned with the use of language, particularly the accountability of language and language users. He states that language users, very basically, “assume, in short, that language is communal, and that its purpose is to tell the truth.”<sup>145</sup> For language to tell the truth, it needs to be locally adapted, precise,

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<sup>142</sup> Berry, “The Specialization of Poetry,” in *Standing by Words*, 7. This genre, by taking interest in what poets say as opposed to what they write, implies to Berry that people view poets as a different kind of person.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Berry, “Standing by Words,” in *Standing by Words*, 26.

and particular. Unlike the language of industrialists and agricultural exploiters that obscures relationships between source and profit, Berry is concerned to be “a cultivator of words.”<sup>146</sup> He looks back to the “old poets” whose first aim was propriety of language. They sought to subject their language to the place instead of the place to their language, understanding, or project. In staying true to their place they sought to tell the truth, which the poet “perceived as *superior* to his powers – and, by clear implication, to his occasion and purpose.”<sup>147</sup> One who cultivates land, relationship, and word is one who submits to the reality outside of their desire. In Berry’s eyes, poetry is a tool for telling the truth about his local place, “a way to learn, know, celebrate, and remember the truth.”<sup>148</sup>

Propriety or decorum of poetic language raises again the issue of craft: “What is the kind, quality, and importance of the subject? What, then, would be the appropriate or fitting or seemly form, style, diction, rhythm with which to treat it?”<sup>149</sup> That is, what form best honors the entirety of its membership? What about this place needs to be remembered? What music or rhythm is faithful to its creatureliness? Issues of craft are inseparable from moral questions of truth of representation and ethical questions of action.

The propriety or appropriateness of language is related closely with the propriety of action. Because the ability to know exactly is related to the ability to speak exactly, Berry recognizes, the use of language is an ethical issue. Unlike some conservationists, Berry is aware that it is not possible or desirable for humans to live without acting,

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *Standing by Words*, 112.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

changing, and influencing creation. Therefore, the question is about *appropriate* action. To act appropriately, one must know where one is and then act on what one knows. Yet, creation and the relations therein are an irreducible mystery. Humans are required to act in the midst of ignorance. According to Berry, ignorance is not a problem of information (we just haven't learned enough, *yet*), but a problem of "form": as limited and sinful creatures, we will never know enough. We will never know enough to make the "right" decision. Therefore, propriety of language and action is tied closely to reverence, humility, and limits.

According to Berry, "propriety is the antithesis of individualism" because it denies individual needs and wants as the measure of appropriate action.<sup>150</sup> The entire membership – humans, land, and creatures together, the smallest unit of health – is the measure of appropriate action. The issue of propriety can be presented as a series of questions: "Where are we?" "Who are we?" "What is our condition?" "What are our abilities?" "What appropriately may we do in our own interest *here*?"<sup>151</sup> These questions focus on the particularity of place, the particular wholeness of *this* membership in *this* place in *this* time. This is the ever-present theme of local adaption in Berry's work, one that we will address in relation to his Sabbath poetry in the following chapters. It is enough to say here that local adaption is the difficult and ongoing process of coming to know a place and, through knowing, becoming native to the place, of conforming desires, hopes, imagination, language, and action to the limits of the place.

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<sup>150</sup> Wendell Berry, *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), 14.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have begun to address Gunton's concern for a fully integrated engagement between the realms of truth (knowing and imagination), goodness (ethics and action) and beauty (arts and aesthetics) by examining Berry on the human imagination and its cultivation through the practice of poetry that aims at fostering a locally adapted imagination. We have shown that for Berry, a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination allows humans to come to know and indwell their places by enabling them to perceive creation's wholeness. Important for Berry's understanding of what it means to be locally adapted is the characterization of the created order as whole and holy. The created order exhibits wholeness when the numerous patterns of relational connections between and among all creatures are healthy and unbroken.

Although only the Lord sees the complete and integral wholeness, holiness, and goodness of the created order, a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination may allow humans to perceive the possibility of the order of creation's wholeness via a vision of its holiness. Often, however, these connections between creatures have been broken by human work that ignores or is blind to the holiness of creation. The health and healing of the created order requires humans to imagine these connections and re-form them through good work that hallow and respect creation's wholeness and integrity. Enacting humanity's dependence on the created order responsibly maintains the relative harmony of the created order's patterns; it is to imagine and conduct oneself as a member alongside and within the whole creaturely network that comprises the created order.

A sympathetic and locally adapted imagination is potentially cultivated by a practice of poetry that wrestles with the limits, memorability, music, and propriety of language in relation to a particular place. This is because the imagination, as a faculty of perception, is trained through embodied, tangible connections with persons, places, and communities. Local adaption is about finding out *where* one is in relation to one's place, seeing its holiness, and learning to live there in ways that respect the entirety of its membership. Practices of local adaption and imagination mediate between persons and their places, between persons and God via their places. Poetry, then, as a way of making or using words, is useful for coming to know and perceive one's place. As Berry understands it, poetry does not exist "for its own sake" but for the sake of creation's wholeness. As a formal discipline that resonates with other formal disciplines, "the poet affirms and collaborates in the formality of Creation."<sup>152</sup> It is a tool and a practice that allows one to participate in and hopefully heal or maintain the patterns of wholeness in creation.

The following two chapters will show, through close reading of his Sabbath poetry, how Berry's Sabbath vision is an integrated and integrating vision of wholeness, one that intentionally imagines the holiness of place in relation to God and seeks the health of the place and its membership through Sabbath-worthy work. His is an imagination that connects a vision of the human place within the created order with concrete practices of work and economy via the practice of poetry. In other words, we will find in Berry a fully integrated vision of human culture that resonates with and exemplifies Gunton's vision of the human vocation as a sacrifice of praise.

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<sup>152</sup> Wendell Berry, "The Responsibility of the Poet," in *What Are People For?*, 89.

## Chapter 5

### “Seeing in it the Sanctity of All Creation”: Wendell Berry’s Sabbath Imagination

*So it is his limitation  
that gives due honor  
to this place, seeing in it  
the sanctity of all  
creation in Heaven’s sight.<sup>1</sup>*

*Wendell Berry*

*The whole earth is at rest, and is  
quiet: they break forth into singing.*

*Isaiah 14:7<sup>2</sup>*

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined Berry’s understanding of the imagination and its cultivation through artistic practices, particularly the practice of poetry. In it we argued that a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination allows humans to come to know and indwell their places by enabling them to perceive creation’s wholeness, and that this form of imagination is cultivated by practices of poetry that engage the limits and propriety of language in relation to a particular place. The practice of poetry, we saw,

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, “XX, 2013,” *Sabbaths 2013* (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 2015), 33.

<sup>2</sup> This is the second of three quotations Berry chose as the epigraph to his entire Sabbath collection published in *This Day*.

holds the potential, through wrestling with the limits and propriety of language in relation to a place's particularities, to cultivate a sympathetic and disciplined imagination.

The practice of poetry is a practice of attention. In Berry's hands, the practice of poetry takes on the additional ethical responsibility of cultivating the imagination to perceive the natural world, particularly the woods, as God's ordered creation: that is, to see the potential patterns of health and wholeness within creation – often referred to in his poetry as the “song” of creation – as well as the connections between person and place, earth and heaven. Poetry for Berry, like farming, is a way of committing to and confronting the limits and particulars of his place, of finding a place for him and his farm within the complex pattern of creation.

Chapters 5 and 6 intend to show how Berry's Sabbath vision is an integrated and integrating vision of wholeness, one that intentionally imagines the holiness of place in relation to God and seeks the health of the place and its membership through Sabbath-worthy work. His imagination connects a vision of the human place in the created order with practices of work and economy via the practice of poetry. As the conclusion will make explicit, this is an example and expansion of Colin Gunton's vision for an offering of a “sacrifice of praise.”

In order to explore Berry's understanding of creation's wholeness as embodied in his Sabbath poetry, this chapter will focus on four major themes found within the Sabbath collection. These are 1) approaching poetry as a place-based vocation, 2) confronting the limits of place through the practice of Sabbath, 3) perceiving the relationship between Heaven and Earth, and 4) hearing the song of creation. The following chapter will take up these themes again, but this time in light of Berry's critiques

of the consumer-industrial economy. Chapter 6 will show how the vision of Sabbath explored in chapter 5 is consonant with an ethic of work and economy. Before attending to these four themes in Berry's Sabbath poetry, we will first provide some background material: on Berry's Sabbath collection, his Sabbath practice of walking in the woods, and the theme of Sabbath in his non-fiction.

## 5.2 “*How May a Human Being Come to Rest?*”

In 2012 and 2013 Berry published two nearly complete collections of poems, his *New Collected Poems* and *This Day*. These two collections – the first comprising his non-Sabbath poems and the second his Sabbath poems – are roughly the same length,<sup>3</sup> span roughly the same period,<sup>4</sup> and cover many of the same themes, even if they are not executed in the same style.<sup>5</sup> This comparison is suggestive because it reveals how Berry's Sabbath poetry makes up approximately half of his published poetic verse.<sup>6</sup> Yet very few reviews of Berry's Sabbath poetry have been published over the years. Secondary literature on Berry's life and corpus often ignores the Sabbath poems completely or treats

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<sup>3</sup> The volumes are also the same coloring and size, designed to stand together on a shelf.

<sup>4</sup> Berry's first book of poetry was published about 10 years before he began writing the Sabbath poems. A few of these early poems also have a similar rhythm to the structure that will become characteristic of his Sabbath poems. See for example, “The Peace of Wild Things” from *Openings* (1968), “The Silence” from *Farming: A Hand Book* (1970), and “The Wild Geese” and “The Silence” from *The Country of Marriage* (1973). All can be found in Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Angyal notes that the Sabbath poems are more formal and structured in both form and language than Berry's other poetry, as well as being more overtly religious. (Andrew J. Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, vol. No. 654, *Twayne's United States Authors Series* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 132).

<sup>6</sup> Not every poem from every earlier collection made it into *New Collected Poems*, which skews the comparison a bit. Although, since *This Day* was published, *Sabbaths 2013* and *A Small Porch* (Sabbaths 2014–2015) have also been published. I assume these new poems help balance the comparison.

them as a personal indulgence, an aside to his “real” work. Berry himself is fairly reticent about commenting on his poetry in general, perhaps perpetuating this neglect.

In contradistinction to this trend, this chapter and the following assume that Berry’s Sabbath poems are indeed central to his poetic enterprise in particular and his oeuvre in general. As the back cover of *This Day* claims, “it is becoming increasingly clear that the Sabbath Poems are the very heart of Berry’s entire enterprise.”<sup>7</sup> His Sabbath poetry presents a vision of human Sabbath rest and suggests a vision for Sabbath-worthy work. A central question, one Berry poses as the epigraph to his 2005–2008 Sabbath poems published in *Leavings*, frames this ongoing project: “How may a human being come to rest?”<sup>8</sup> His answer to this question, of course, is considered not only in the Sabbath poems themselves, but in his fiction and essays as well. As the following chapter will explore in detail, the quality of rest that the Sabbath requires can be fulfilled only by the kind work, economy, and life that enables and leads to joy, delight, and rest. The patterns of work and economy that Berry rails against in his non-fiction – the consumer-industrial economy, colonial agriculture and agribusiness, the disintegration of community, the exploitation of the land – are forms of human engagement with creation that can never lead to the promised Sabbath rest and peace; they prevent this peace from coming because one cannot exploit the land and its people six days of the week and expect to rest joyfully and harmoniously with it on the seventh.

The present chapter concerns Berry’s Sabbath practice and poetic vision for Sabbath rest. These Sabbath poems themselves participate in the peace of the Sabbath

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<sup>7</sup> Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), back cover.

<sup>8</sup> Wendell Berry, *Leavings: Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 29.

and represent a practice of contemplation that enables Berry to imagine how practically to orient his whole life and work toward the goal of Sabbath rest. His Sabbath poems are, in this way, an ethically significant practice. The Sabbath poems find coherence in his practice of walking over his land and in woods on Sundays. Since at least 1979, Berry has made it his practice to walk, observe, contemplate, rest, and perhaps, just perhaps, be inspired to write a poem. These poems reflect not only on his experience in the woods, though they certainly do so, but the whole of his life.

The topics appearing in Berry's Sabbath poems are wide-ranging. In addition to poems that specifically reflect on the nature of Sabbath, rest, work, and the sanctity of creation – which will be covered in depth later in this chapter and the following – there are poems musing on the lives of creatures (e.g., IV, 1980; IV, 2002; X, 2011; IV, V, 2014) and on the beauty of creation (e.g., VI, 2014);<sup>9</sup> poems in memory or in honor of friends (e.g., III, 1989; V, 1993; I, 1996; IX, 2009); poems written from the perspective of his Port William characters (e.g., VI, 1989; VI, 2000; IV, 2004; II, 2006) and historical literary characters (e.g., III, 1994; XII, 2010); poems on the practice of writing (e.g., VII, 1994; VIII, 2007); poems reflecting on scripture (e.g., I, 2004; XII, 2008); poems in anger or lament over war and the brokenness of politics (e.g., I, 1991; VII, VIII, IX, X, 2003; III, 2004; III, 2005) and against the destruction of the industrial economy (e.g., I, 1997; IV, 2001; XII, 2008; VI, 2010); poems of love for his wife, Tanya (e.g., IX, 1992; VI,

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<sup>9</sup> Very few of Berry's Sabbath poems have titles. Instead, they are listed chronologically by year and the Roman numeral indicates their order within the year. Thus poem IV, 1980 is the fourth Sabbath poem from 1980, X, 2011 is the tenth poem from 2011, and so on. This chapter and the next will reference three books of Berry's Sabbath poetry: *This Day* (Sabbath poems 1979–2012), *Sabbaths 2013* (Sabbath poems 2013), and *A Small Porch* (Sabbath poems 2014–2015).

2009), and for his children and grandchildren (e.g., V, VI, 1982; X, 2009); poems that are prayers to God (e.g., X, 2002; I, 2005; XI, 2009; XI, 2013) and reflect on the pleasure God has in creation (e.g., III, 1979; VII, 1999); one poem as the Mad Farmer<sup>10</sup> (XXI, 2012) and one on a year in the life of his farm (IX, 1991). Many of these themes recur in his other collections of non-Sabbath poems. For Berry, the breadth of topics above signals that all of life is implicated in the goal of Sabbath. The implied answer to the question, “How may a human come to rest?”, as we will come to find out, is by ordering one’s whole life by the rhythms, harmonies, and patterns of creation.

### **5.2.1 Against the Explainers**

This chapter and the next will try to avoid the egregious sin of attempting to “explain” the meaning of Berry’s poetry. Throughout his life, Berry has repeatedly rejected the impulse of explanation. This is because, for Berry, an explanation changes whatever is explained; it “is reductive, not comprehensive; most of the time, when you have explained something you discover leftovers. An explanation is a bucket, not a well.”<sup>11</sup> For example, when he is discussing the poetry of William Carlos Williams, Berry rhetorically asks: “What does [‘The Negro Woman’] ‘mean’? There is no explanatory construct of thought that anybody can stand beside this poem to help ‘understand’ it.... It means what it says.”<sup>12</sup> Even recognizing that working with an artistic medium is to a

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<sup>10</sup> The “Mad Farmer” is a dramatic persona that Berry occasionally adopts to represent his frustration with contemporary farming and modern consumer-industrial life. His “Mad Farmer” poems are scattered throughout his work, though only one appears in his Sabbath collections.

<sup>11</sup> Wendell Berry, *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), 113.

<sup>12</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011), 18.

degree a conscious effort to learn and perfect that medium, the meaning of a work of the arts cannot be fully understood through techniques or rules. “Meaning,” for Berry, “is a distancing word of abstraction and displacement, seeming always to refer to an idea that is separable and separate from any thing.” Instead, a poem’s “meaning is incarnate.”<sup>13</sup>

Art, creatures, and human life, for Berry, are too complex to be explained, particularly by science. What we know about other creatures and ourselves “must be pictured or told or sung or danced. And I don’t think pictures or stories or songs or dances can be explained.”<sup>14</sup> Pictures, stories, songs, dances – works of the arts – are important because they are intrinsically resistant to explanation. He argues, “You cannot translate a poem into an explanation, any more than you can translate a poem into a painting or a painting into a piece of music or a piece of music into a walking stick. A work of art says what it says in the only way it can be said.”<sup>15</sup> A work of the arts means what it says. If it can be explained, Berry cautions, then it is always in danger of being “explained away.”<sup>16</sup>

Works of the arts intrinsically resist explanation because, as Berry maintains, “art insists upon the irreducibility of its subjects; and works of art, as objects, are by nature not reducible.”<sup>17</sup> This is to say, first, that the subjects of works of the arts, as creatures, are not fully explainable. Second, works of the arts are not themselves fully explainable because they are creatures and made from creatures. Subject, materials, and finished object are all irreducible. And third, it is the nature of art – or at least “all art that rises above

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>14</sup> Berry, *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 113.

competence”<sup>18</sup> – to insist on the irreducibility and integrity of its subject. Works of the arts seek to imagine and present their subjects as fully themselves. Berry claims, “The truest tendency of art is toward the exaltation, not the reduction, of its subjects.”<sup>19</sup> This exaltation consists in crafting objects that are inherently valuable and particular, ones that cannot be substituted with or for other objects.

And yet, referring to Williams’s poetry, Berry claims that poetic language is also a “reaching” beyond the limit of words, like prayer, “toward a reality that they cannot directly express.”<sup>20</sup> Thus a poem can, without contradiction, mean what it says, mean more than it says, and mean more than the poet intended it to say.<sup>21</sup> The key, for Berry, is knowing when and where to limit the discussion of a poem so it does not become “explanation” in the reductive sense.

With this warning in mind, I will attempt to hold Berry’s poems lightly and nimbly, avoiding the temptation, in the words of poet Billy Collins, to “tie the poem to a chair with a rope / and torture a confession out of it,” or “begin beating it with a hose / to find out what it really means.”<sup>22</sup> Explanations are, as Berry writes, a bucket and not a well. Thus, to attend to Berry’s poetry is to attend to the way that exists as *poetry* and not as fiction or non-fiction, even if we turn to his essays for additional perspective. The very fact that Berry is compelled to write poetry, even if the themes overlap with his other works, means he believes that there is something to be revealed that can be revealed only

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>20</sup> Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford*, 64–65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Billy Collins, “Introduction to Poetry,” in *The Apple that Astonished Paris*, (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 58.

in poetic verse or experienced only through the practice of writing such verse. The following interpretations and exegesis of Berry's Sabbath poetry, then, are not meant to be exhaustive but suggestive, and will tease out a few central threads of his Sabbath vision for human engagement with creation through culture-making.

### **5.3 *The Theme of Sabbath in Berry's Work***

#### **5.3.1 The Sabbath in Berry's Non-Fiction**

Although Berry has written nearly forty years of Sabbath poetry, he rarely discusses this theme directly in his non-fiction. One exception is to be found in his essay *The Gift of Good Land*, where Berry outlines a biblical argument for ecological and agricultural responsibility and explores some practical implications of this argument.<sup>23</sup> For Berry, the best place to begin uncovering the biblical sense of human responsibility for creation is not in the Genesis creation narratives, but in the stories of the Promised Land. The logic behind this move is that the Promised Land is a gift given to *fallen* people, and “for this reason the giving is more problematical, and the receiving is more conditional and more difficult.”<sup>24</sup> The rest of the Torah is even more explicit than the opening chapters of Genesis on the giftedness of the land. This is a God-given gift that is conditioned upon certain behaviors, attitudes, and practices – hence the giving of the law. It is a gift given for a time and for only so long as it is properly cared for. This is not ownership, but tenancy and stewardship. This good land was given to the Israelites not as a reward for faithfulness, but in their subsequent faithfulness to God's decrees “they must

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<sup>23</sup> Wendell Berry, “The Gift of Good Land,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 293-304.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

prove worthy of it afterwards; they must use it well, or they will not continue long in it.”<sup>25</sup>  
The land is a gift seeking a response.

For Berry, the Sabbath is the most significant symbol of God’s continuing lordship over the land. In addition to the weekly Sabbath practices by persons and animals, the land itself was given a Sabbath every seventh year, and a total Sabbath or “Sabbath of Sabbaths” every fiftieth. The former required the land to be left fallow, while the latter additionally included the returning of land to original tenants and families. Beyond the agricultural and social intents of such requirements, “these sabbaths ritualized an observance of the limits of ‘my power and the might of mine hand’ – the limits of human control.”<sup>26</sup>

### **5.3.2 A Thirty-Nine Year Poetic Project**

In contrast to his fiction and essays, nearly half of Berry’s poetry has been explicitly concerned with the theme of Sabbath. In 2013 Wendell Berry published *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, which gathers together his Sabbath poems written between 1979 and 2012.<sup>27</sup> It includes all previous Sabbath collections, as well as uncollected individual poems scattered in various magazines. This collection embodies over thirty years of Berry’s musings on the Sabbath – both the concept of the Sabbath and his experiences of creation’s beauty, rest, and peace, or lack thereof on his Sunday walks. Since the publication of *This Day*, Berry has additionally published a full collection of his Sabbath poems of 2013 in *Sabbaths 2013*, as well as his 2014–2015 Sabbath poems

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> This collection also includes two poems from 2013 as a preface. The entire collection of the Sabbath poems from 2013 was published as *Sabbaths 2013*.

published in *A Small Porch*. A single Sabbath poem from 2016 closes *The Art of Loading Brush*, a hint of more poems to come.

Berry's first volume of Sabbath poetry, *Sabbaths*, was published in 1987 and contained poems written between 1979 and 1985. Long before, in April 1980, Berry wrote to friend and fellow poet Gary Snyder about this new project. What Berry writes in 1980 is still applicable to the later collections: "These poems [Sabbaths of 1979] are the result, partly, of a whole pattern of dissatisfactions: with my time and history, with my work, with my grasp of problems, with such solutions as I have found, with the traditions both of poetry and religion that the poems attempt to use and serve."<sup>28</sup> This letter reveals at least two interrelated motivations behind Berry's Sabbath poems. First, Berry was dissatisfied with current practices of agriculture, especially the larger consumer-industrial culture that malforms farming, and his personal attempts to resist these practices on his own marginal farm. This dissatisfaction has grown only sharper with time, as his non-fiction shows. His Sabbath poetry was and is an attempt to confront himself, his history, his place, and his work.

Second, Berry was dissatisfied with the traditions of poetry and religion. Berry has written elsewhere of his dissatisfaction with the Southern Baptist tradition in which he was raised, particularly with any spirituality that seeks to escape or destroy earth for heaven. Berry insists, "There must be 'holy places' such as those venerated by the [First Nation Peoples] or those where, as Eliot writes, 'prayer has been valid.'"<sup>29</sup> The bible does portray God as both transcendent and immanent, affirming the presence of the holy in

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<sup>28</sup> Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, *Distant Neighbors: The Selected Letters of Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder*, ed. Chad Wriglesworth (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2014), 57.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

particular places, but also everywhere in creation. Berry did and does not, finally, want to abandon Christianity – he comments in an early letter to Snyder of his “adolescent rebellion” against the institution of the church “which lasted too long.”<sup>30</sup> Even so, his Sabbath poetry attempts to serve religion as well as use its language and concepts, pointing to a richly sympathetic and ecologically attentive spirituality.

In the introduction to *This Day*, Berry confesses that he is a “bad-weather churchgoer,” attending church only when the weather is poor and not good for walking. Instead, he typically walks in the woods with the theme of the Sabbath on his mind. Berry explicitly connects his Sabbath poems and Sabbath practice to God’s rest on the seventh day in Genesis 2:2 and the commandment to remember and keep the Sabbath day holy in Exodus 20:8–11.<sup>31</sup> On these Sunday walks, Berry experiences freedom from expectations, from himself, and from others. Occasionally, the Muse strikes and Berry is inspired to write a poem. In the original preface to his collection of Sabbath poems *A Timbered Choir*, reprinted in *This Day*, Berry writes that his Sabbath poems “are about moments when heart and mind are open and aware.”<sup>32</sup> He remarks that in rereading thirty-plus years of his Sabbath poems, “I have been surprised by the sense they convey (at least to me) of my struggle to know what I have been doing in my work, my dwelling place, and this world.”<sup>33</sup> These poems witness to Berry’s ongoing attempts to know and engage his small part of creation faithfully.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. Berry continues that this adolescent rebellion is for him, “probably permanently so, for I still see no church that I could be at home in. I am a solitary Christian – a most paradoxical creature” (*ibid.*).

<sup>31</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, xxi.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

## 5.4 *Berry's Sabbath Vision Embodied in Poetry*

### 5.4.1 **Berry's Vocation as a Placed Poet**

Berry, like Williams, understands the relationship between his poetry and his place as the process of becoming locally adapted. He understands himself as a placed poet. In Sabbath poem VII, 1994, Berry reflects as a whole on his vocation as a writer. The first half of the poem reads as follows:

I would not have been a poet  
except that I have been in love  
alive in this mortal world,  
or an essayist except that I  
have been bewildered and afraid,  
or a storyteller had I not heard  
stories passing to me through the air,  
or a writer at all except  
I have been wakeful at night  
And words have come to me  
Out of their deep caves,  
Needing to be remembered.<sup>34</sup>

As a writer, Berry writes of things he feels need to be and are worthy of being remembered. He is a poet out of love, an essayist out of confusion, and a novelist out of gift. This poem ends with the affirmation that these three roles – poet, essayist, novelist – have been his way of serving “that triumph;” his way of serving his marriage, his work on his farm, and his local woods – which is his way of serving all of God’s creation through serving his local place.

Although *This Day* does not include all of the Sabbath poems from 2013, two are included as a preface to the entire collection. This breaks the chronology of the Sabbath poems, since the collection ends with the poems from 2012. I would suggest that this

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 154.

break signals that these two poems – I and II, 2013 – are critical for understanding the collection as a whole. Important for our purposes in this chapter, they offer a hint as to what kind of poet would write this kind of poetry and what the poet sees himself doing.

Sabbath poem I, 2013 gives us a sense of who Berry understands himself to be as a poet. The following is an excerpt from the beginning and end of this poem.

This is a poet of the river lands,  
a lowdown man of the deepest  
depth of the valley, where gravity gathers  
the waters, the poisons, the trash,  
where light comes late and leaves early.

...

The poet, his window, and his poems  
are creatures of the shore that the river  
gnaws, dissolves, and carries away.  
He is a tree of a sort, rooted  
in the dark, aspiring to the light,  
dependent on both. His poems  
are leavings, sheddings, gathered  
from the light, as it has come,  
and offered to the dark, which he believes  
must shine with sight,  
with light, dark only to him.<sup>35</sup>

Berry explicitly positions himself in this poem as a placed poet. He reveals that his poetry and poetic motivation cannot be understood without reference to the river valley in which he makes his life. He, his farm, and his poetry are members together of this marginal land. The poet is “a tree of a sort, rooted” in this place and dependent upon the fertility of the land, “the dark,”<sup>36</sup> and God’s blessings for and joy in creation, “the light.”

Although he describes his poetry as mere “leavings, sheddings,” he carefully brings them into being to convey a glimpse of God’s Sabbath light into the darkness of this world.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>36</sup> “The dark” in Berry’s poetry often refers to the soil and the cycle of death through which all creatures live.

The second poem in the preface to *This Day* is Sabbath poem II, 2013. This poem gives readers a peek into Berry's poetic process and his goal. Printed here are the latter two-thirds or so of the poem.

...He goes among the trees,  
climbing again the one hill of his life.  
With his hand full of words he goes  
into the wordless, wording it barely  
in time as he passes. One by one he places  
words, balancing on each  
as on a small stone in the swift flow  
in his anxious patience until  
the next arrives, until he has come  
at last again into presentiment  
of the Real, the wholly real in its grand  
composure, for which as before  
he knows no word. And here again  
he must stop. Here by luck or grace he may  
find rest, which he has been seeking  
all along. Sometimes by the time's flaws  
and his own, he fails. And then  
by luck or grace he will be given  
another day to try again, to go maybe  
yet farther before again he must stop.  
He is a gatherer of fragments, a cobbler  
of pieces. Piece by piece he tells  
a story without end, for in the time  
of this world no end can come.  
It is the story of eternity's shining,  
much shadowed, much put off,  
in time. And time, however long, falls short.<sup>37</sup>

On the Sabbath, the wording poet again enters the wordless woods for his Sunday walk seeking rest. In respect for the wordlessness of the woods, Berry shows restraint by “wording it barely.” He is not in the woods to force the place into submission but instead to submit himself and his imagination to the place. The reader gets a sense of this restraint and the poet's “anxious patience” to carefully place one word of the poem after

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<sup>37</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 4–5.

another in order to faithfully anticipate the presence of “the Real,” a vision of this small place in creation in light of its eternal aspect, “the story of eternity’s shining, / much shadowed, much put off, / in time.”

Through careful attention to the creatures and relationships in his place, Berry awaits a glimpse of Sabbath rest of creation with God, “the wholly real...for which as before / he knows no word.” This moment of spiritual vision serves as the poet’s limit and the point at which he may “by luck or grace” find rest. Berry, ever the advocate of propriety, deems it appropriate to stop when he reaches the point where he doesn’t have words to describe this vision clearly. Unlike other poets – such as, in his opinion, Milton<sup>38</sup> – he does not try to describe the indescribable. Instead, he contents himself with gathering the “fragments” of the Sabbath vision imaginable in his place and “cobble” them together into a small witness of creation bathed in Sabbath light.

These two poems offer the reader an orientation from which to read the rest of the collection. Whatever meaning the reader makes with these Sabbath poems, poems I and II, 2013 invite the reader to do so in light of Berry’s self-understood vocation as a placed poet who seeks to do justice to the particularities of his place and to give – in the words of the final Sabbath poem of 2013 – “due honor / to this place, seeing in it / the sanctity of all / creation in Heaven’s sight” (XX, 2013).<sup>39</sup> This is an elegant summary of the vocation and goal Berry has set for himself in this poetic project.

Berry’s Sabbath practice and poetic project, to honor and do justice to his place, to come to understand, love, and imagine the multitude of particularities in his place, is

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<sup>38</sup> See Wendell Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 33.

creaturely and thus finite. As II, 2013 concludes, “And time, however long, falls short.”

This project is limited in at least two ways. First, as a creature, Berry will never completely understand or imagine the complex reality of his place. Second, the place itself is also always changing; it does not yield itself to static depiction. As Berry writes in III, 2013,

In a country you know by heart  
it is impossible to go the same way twice.  
Changes of time, mind, weather,  
and light make all ways new.  
To one whose eyes have opened, any place  
is compounded of places unending  
to the end of time, and travel is well  
accomplished by standing still.<sup>40</sup>

Only by “standing still” is Berry able both to “know by heart” his place and never “go the same way twice.” Creation’s order is dynamic, responsive, and ever new. One who is awake and attentive to these changes, “one whose eyes have opened” as the poem states, will be able to experience any number of places by staying rooted in place. This entails a commitment to the practice of attention. In committing to pay attention to one’s place, one does not know fully what to expect, as in the experience described in X, 2011:

I saw a hummingbird stand  
in midair and scratch his cheek  
vigorously with his left foot,  
as he might have done perched  
at ease upon a tree. “Wonderful!”  
I said to myself. “I never dreamed  
of such a thing before, and now  
after seventy-seven years  
of watching, I have seen it!”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>41</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 369.

Through his committed attention to place, in his practice of sitting in silence and watching, Berry was able to witness a delightful sight. He did not expect to see it, “never dreamed / of such a thing before,” but because of his commitment to really seeing his farm, his woods, and all the creatures therein, he experienced this sight as a gift.

It is interesting, in light of Berry’s commitment to place, to recognize that Berry’s walks into the woods are, for him, a form of pilgrimage. They are a pilgrimage to both a place and a vision. One of his first Sabbath poems – IV, 1979 – describes his response to the sounding of Sunday church bells,

I hear, but understand  
Contrarily, and walk into the woods.  
I leave labor and load,  
Take up a different story.”<sup>42</sup>

The story that he intends to “take up” by walking in the woods is the “immortal memory that it keeps” of Eden, striving to hear the “strewn remnants of the primal Sabbath’s hymn.”<sup>43</sup> In order to submit himself to that vision and seek its rest,

I go in pilgrimage  
Across an old fenced boundary  
To wilderness without age  
Where, in their long dominion,  
The trees have been left free.<sup>44</sup>

The woods in their freedom from human aspiration present a vision that “is no human vision / Subject to our revision” because “God’s eye holds every leave as light is worn.”<sup>45</sup> Faced with this vision of Sabbath rest he is able to “let go my hopes and plans / That no toil can perfect” and instead imagine creation’s rhythms as “the life that steps and sings in

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 11–12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 12.

ways of death.”<sup>46</sup> This practice of submitting one’s imagination to the woods and seeking locally adapted practices of work calls for commitment to place.

Berry’s commitment to his local place and his commitment to keep his farm in imitation of the processes of the woods has been met with some ridicule. Berry writes in VII, 2000 how,

Some had derided him  
As unadventurous,  
For he would not give up  
What he had vowed to keep.<sup>47</sup>

Yet he does not view the work of “keeping,” and sometimes “losing,” his land and his farm as “unadventurous.” Instead, he writes,

These were his pilgrimage,  
Were his adventure, near  
And far, at home and in  
In the world beyond this world.<sup>48</sup>

His work and his rest, his six days and his Sunday, were themselves a pilgrimage through time and in place. The process of becoming native to his place, of understanding the patterns of wholeness and brokenness in his place, of seeking work that leads to rest and joy was an adventure into engaging the order of creation in light of a vision of its Sabbath and the Sabbath of Heaven.

The theme of pilgrimage also recurs in the final Sabbath poem of *This Day*, XXI, 2012. Written in the dramatic persona of the Mad Farmer, this poem narrates how “as a child, the Mad Farmer saw easily / the vision of Heaven’s Christ born in a stable.”<sup>49</sup> As a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 12–13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 397.

shepherd himself, he was able to imagine the star in the sky, the proximity of the animals, the cold night on a hill, and “the light of very Heaven falling upon them.”<sup>50</sup> As a child, his vision of “on earth / peace, good will” was a “...gift, / only of moments, he has kept in his eyes, in his heart.”<sup>51</sup> Yet, the brokenness of the world – polluted rivers, blasted mountains, dead children, bombed villages – has drawn humans far from this vision of peace. Faced with this destruction, the Mad Farmer desires to seek out again the now faint light of that promise:

He thinks of distance, the hard hung journey  
of a foolish man, a pilgrim in the foreshadow  
of apocalypse...

...Beyond and beyond  
is the shepherd-startling, ever-staying light.  
No creature of his slow-minded kind may ever  
stand in that light again. He sets out.<sup>52</sup>

Even though the Mad Farmer is “a pilgrim in the foreshadow / of the apocalypse,” one who sees the distance between the vision and the current state of the world, and even though “No creature of his slow-minded kind may ever / stand in that light again,” the Mad farmer “sets out.” The Mad Farmer is a foolish pilgrim seeking to find and live within the vision of peace that Christ’s incarnation promised to the world. For this reason, he commits to his local land and seeks the peace and good will of the land – its Sabbath – amidst the six-day workweek.

It is striking that the phrase “He sets out” is the final line of this Sabbath collection. Although perhaps coincidental, it signals that the work of becoming native to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

place, becoming locally adapted, is not at an end. Even after over thirty years of submitting his imagination to his place, over thirty years of “seeing in it /the sanctity of all / creation in heaven’s sight,” (XX, 2013)<sup>53</sup> Berry is still journeying toward the promised light of Christ’s peace as embodied in the vision and practice of Sabbath.

#### **5.4.2 A Sabbath *in* the Woods: Confronting Limits**

When Berry takes his Sabbath walks in the woods adjacent to his property, he is outside instead of inside, on foot instead of in a car or on a horse: these are intentional decisions. Berry moves outside of the areas under active human cultivation – his farm and fields – into areas that are not or no longer under active human cultivation. He urges, in XI: “The Farm,” 1991,

To rest, go to the woods  
Where what is made is made  
Without your thought or work.  
Sit down; begin the wait...

Soon you must go. The trees,  
Your seniors, standing thus  
Acknowledged in your eyes,  
Stand as your praise and prayer.  
Your rest is in this praise  
Of what you cannot be  
And of what you cannot do.<sup>54</sup>

Human rest is found in the knowledge of our limits because, when a person comes into the woods, as he writes in VIII.7: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014,

...He comes  
to a place of rest where he cannot  
mistake himself as larger than he is,  
the place of the gray flycatcher,  
the yellow butterfly, the green dragonfly,

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<sup>53</sup> Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 33.

<sup>54</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 125.

the white violet, the columbine,  
where he cannot mistake himself  
as more graced or graceful than he is...<sup>55</sup>

In the woods, among the trees, human beings begin to learn their place in the pattern of creation. This is, in the language of the previous chapter, to become locally adapted to place. Humans are not the ones controlling or maintaining the fertility and life of creation. The woods clearly expose the limits of human power. The life of the membership of the woods goes on with the gracious and gratuitous cycle of life and death without the need for human interaction. Its creaturely self-sufficiency is God-given and heaven-made, not human-given or human-made.

On these weekly walks, when he witnesses “nature’s principles of self-sustaining wholeness and health,” Berry writes that he perceives the connections between “the natural and the supernatural, the heavenly and the earthly, the soul and the body, the wondrous and the ordinary, all appear to occur together in the one fabric of creation.”<sup>56</sup> This self-sustaining wholeness, for Berry, implies creaturely limits. He writes, “To rest, we must accept Nature’s limits and our own. When we come to our limit, we must be still.”<sup>57</sup> Stillness and rest counter the American consumer-industrial economy that seeks endless economic growth. Although all rest shares in the Sabbath, what is important for Berry is that, when explicitly and consciously understood and sought, Sabbath “becomes an unexcusing standard by which to judge our history, our lives, and our work.”<sup>58</sup> For Berry,

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<sup>55</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2016), 22.

<sup>56</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, xxii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

Sabbath rest is the criterion that judges human engagement with creation, as will become clearer in the following chapter.

Sabbath rest is found in recognizing and observing human limits. As Berry writes in a non-Sabbath poem titled “Healing”: “Order is the only possibility of rest. / The made order must seek the given order, and find its place in it.”<sup>59</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, the form of human wholeness Berry envisions does not include everything, but involves working and imagining relationships within clearly defined limits. Here also, Sabbath rest and praise of God is found by recognizing “what you cannot be / And of what you cannot do” (XI: “The Farm,” 1991).<sup>60</sup> Berry’s Sabbath practice and poetry intentionally seek to understand and wrestle with these limits of place and time.

Berry’s practice of walking in the woods is an intentional cultivation of a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination. He seeks to understand his place in the given order of things, yet recognizes that finding Sabbath rest is a gift of the Lord. His second Sabbath poem (II, 1979) muses,

The mind that comes to rest is tended  
In ways that it cannot intend:  
Is borne, preserved, and comprehended  
By what it cannot comprehend.  
Your Sabbath, Lord, thus keeps us by  
Your will, not ours. And it is fit  
Our only choice should be to die  
Into that rest, or out of it.<sup>61</sup>

Humans actively seek rest and silence, but what they find is beyond their control.

According to this poem, the only choice humans can make is either to “die / Into that

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<sup>59</sup> Wendell Berry, “Healing,” in *What Are People For?* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 12.

<sup>60</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 125.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

rest, or out of it,” which is to say that humans can participate in the order that is “the only possibility of rest” and intentionally orient their lives towards the pattern of God’s creation, or they can resist it. In the language of II, 1979, humans work to enter the rest of the Sabbath, but it is the Lord who tends their minds and imaginations. Humans can choose “to die” into the rest of the Sabbath and yet only by the Lord’s will do they find it and are kept by it. As he writes elsewhere, “Where we arrive by work, we stay by grace” (IV, 1983).<sup>62</sup> Humans are called to work and rest that lie in harmony with creation, but their ability to fulfill that call is God-given.

In Berry’s life, the insights of this early poem have been validated by later poems. Berry’s mind has indeed come to rest and was tended in ways he did not necessarily intend. In 2014, after thirty-five years, Berry reflects on this intentional practice of walking and confronting the woods as his God-given limit and inspiration. He writes in section eleven of VIII: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014,

To sit or walk many days  
and years, looking from the woods  
into the woods, will lead beyond  
methodology, beyond even sight,  
into the sense, the presence, of the one  
life of the forest composed  
of uncountable lives in countless  
years, each life coherent itself within  
the coherence, the great composure,  
of all. This no observer could make  
or can explain. Within it, every  
thought puts the earth at stake.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>63</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 27.

Although Berry loves these walks and loves being in the presence of wild creatures, he has realized that his practice leads beyond itself, beyond any intentional methodology he has developed for wrestling with what it looks like for a human being to come to rest. What this practice has enabled is for him to come “into the sense, the presence, of the one / life of the forest.” That is, this practice has enabled him to perceive the wholeness of the pattern of his woods.

Part of perceiving the wholeness and pattern of the woods is to imagine the woods as *creation*, as an orderly and ordered whole with a past, present, and future, beloved by God and in ongoing relationship to the creator. As Berry writes in XII, 2007, the practice of Sabbath enables one to,

Learn by little the desire for all things  
which perhaps is not desire at all  
but undying love which perhaps  
is not love at all but gratitude  
for the being of all things which  
perhaps is not gratitude at all  
but the maker’s joy in which is made,  
the joy in which we come to rest.<sup>64</sup>

The practice of finding rest and silence on the Sabbath – and by implication all this involves during the preceding six days, as we will explore in the next chapter – is a process of learning to love, be thankful for, and to take joy in the Creator’s world. As he reflects in his essay “Economy and Pleasure,” affection for and pleasure in the createdness of God’s creation, in delighting in God’s delight of creation, also signals an implicit “obligation to preserve God’s pleasure in all things.”<sup>65</sup> By learning desire, love, gratitude,

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<sup>64</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 312.

<sup>65</sup> Berry, “Economy and Pleasure,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 214.

and joy in and for creation, humans are learning to perceive creation as God does. It is in God's joy and delight in creation that we are able to participate in the Lord's Sabbath and find inspiration to orient our work as well as our rest.

### **5.4.3 Heaven and Earth (1): Earth as the Threshold of Heaven**

As an intentionally placed poet who attends to the limits of his place, Berry is able to imagine his place as the threshold of heaven and entrance into the eternal presence of the Sabbath. The relationship between heaven and earth is a recurring theme in Berry's Sabbath poetry, and one to which he attended even before he began writing Sabbath poems. In "The Wild Geese," a kind of pre-Sabbath project Sabbath poem published in 1973, Berry finds himself on horseback one Sunday morning after the harvest. The poem reflects on the tastes of persimmons and wild grapes and the flight of geese. These particularities lead Berry to conclude: "what we need is here." He writes,

And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. What we need is here.<sup>66</sup>

This sentiment recurs in VII, 2008: "Look down, look down, and save your soul / by honest dirt."<sup>67</sup> Berry is not denying that there is a heaven or that earth will become a new creation. Rather, he is rejecting an escapist mentality that fails to understand that we have been given all we need for life and that it is a blessed gift. Our prayer should be not for escape, but for a quiet heart and a clear eye: a heart that is content with its place and an eye that perceives its place clearly. Humans should pray for a heart that is content to

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<sup>66</sup> Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 180.

<sup>67</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 321.

stay, so as to be faithful to a place, and eyes that perceive and imagine what needs to be done in a specific place.

The first reason, according to Berry, that humans do not need to escape earth for heaven is that earth is itself the threshold of heaven. As Berry writes in V, 2000,

...And I know  
that this is one of the thresholds  
between Earth and Heaven,  
from which even I may step  
forth from my self and be free.<sup>68</sup>

By recognizing his membership with his land, Berry is able to walk upon it in “the health of self-forgetfulness,” and in this self-forgetfulness is freed to see his land as the threshold of heaven.

At least two Sabbath poems, I, 2004 and I, 2006, reflect on Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28:11–17 and portray the earth as the threshold or “bottom rung” of heaven. The first of these poems, I, 2004, was in response to viewing *Jacob’s Dream*, a painting by William Blake. Berry explicitly identifies Genesis 28:11–17 in the epigraph. Both poems blur the identity of Jacob and Berry. Poem I, 2004 reflects on “a young man” in reference to Jacob in Genesis 28, but it also can be read in reference to Berry in his place. Again, although I, 2006 is written in Berry’s voice, it explicitly evokes the story of Jacob’s dream.

We will first consider Sabbath I, 2006. The first few lines of the poem reject the exclusiveness of a “chosen few” or the “elect.” He is not seeking escape from earth into heaven. Instead, Berry describes himself as “knocking / at the door” and “one whose foot / is on the bottom rung. / But I know that Heaven’s / bottom rung is Heaven.”<sup>69</sup> Berry is

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 283.

not worried about being one of the elect or chosen few because he understands himself to already dwell at the threshold of heaven on earth. Berry makes the connection with

Genesis 28 explicit in the last few lines:

though the ladder is standing  
on the earth where I work  
by day and at night sleep  
with my head upon a stone.<sup>70</sup>

By day, Berry works to bring health and wholeness to his land, to cooperate with its Sabbath joy and goodness. By night, like Jacob, he sleeps upon a land with ongoing connections to heaven.

Sabbath I, 2004 develops similar imagery and themes, though its reflection on the passage from Genesis is more explicit. The first four stanzas set the narrative stage with Jacob sleeping, the stair connecting heaven and earth, and the movement of the angels.

In stanza five, the focus changes.

...In sleep  
The dreamer wakes. He sees  
Above the stars the deep  
Of Heaven opened.<sup>71</sup>

In his dream, Jacob/Berry is allowed a glimpse into heaven. This glimpse prompts two related questions,

...Is  
He living, then, his part  
Of Heaven's earthly life?  
And what shall be the art  
By which this sight can live?<sup>72</sup>

The staircase connects earth and heaven, making earth the lowest step of heaven. But the glimpse of heaven afforded this man forces him to interrogate his life and work. Is he

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 249.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 250.

living his life as if it were the life of heaven? And what character of engagement with the creation will witness to the life of heaven?

Whatever the case, this glimpse of heaven renders the seer a witness to the truth:

His land – this meager sod,  
These stones, this low estate –  
Is the household of God.  
And it is Heaven’s gate.<sup>73</sup>

“Heaven’s gate” is still part of heaven, just as, in I, 2006, “Heaven’s bottom rung is Heaven.” Berry imagines his land as a threshold of heaven not because his land is highly prized or a place of dramatic history. It is, in his own words, marginal land, scarred land. It is not the inherent worth of his land that allows it to be described as a gateway to heaven.

Similarly, in the following excerpt from XX, 2013, Berry presents his “backwater,” “boondock,” “nowhere” land as a microcosm of creation.

The lowlife poet moreover  
is the poet of a “backwater,”  
a “boondock,” a “nowhere”  
where life starts, yes,  
from low down, but also  
from high up, from the soil,  
the sunlight, the falling rain  
joining Heaven and Earth,  
...  
At night this lowly where  
is reached by every visible  
flicker of the universe, to which  
it is central, for it is the center  
of the poet’s half-lighted mind,  
the only consciousness he has.  
So it is his limitation  
that gives due honor  
to this place, seeing in it

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

the sanctity of all  
creation in Heaven's sight.<sup>74</sup>

In this poem, Berry reflects on his vocation as a “lowlife poet.”<sup>75</sup> He is a poet intimately connected, through love and memory, to this “lowly where.” Yet his awareness and imagination as a poet allows Berry to see this backwater boondock as the center of the universe and as a representative of all creation's holiness. Berry honors his nowhere land – to draw on the language of William Carlos Williams – by seeing it in relation to its eternal aspect. In his land, Berry perceives the holiness of all creation. To his eyes, this land is honorable, sacred, loved, and the origin of life. This marginal land is connected to heaven both in the earthly sense of life-giving rain and light, but also in the metaphysical sense that his land is within the sight of God. The latter harkens back to Genesis 1: “And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good.” Even if it is lowly nowhere land, Heaven – and by circumlocution, God – still beholds it, still cares for it. Berry is able to recognize and participate in this truth by crafting poetry about and for his place, as well as practicing fidelity and good work on his farm.

Berry's farm is the threshold of heaven in another sense – it is located in the world into which Christ was incarnate and was resurrected. He writes in awe “that we / Ourselves are living in the world / It happened in when it first happened.”<sup>76</sup> As a shepherd, Berry is able to imagine,

That we ourselves, opening a stall  
(A latch thrown open countless times  
Before), might find them breathing there,

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<sup>74</sup> Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 32–33.

<sup>75</sup> This is “lowlife” in the sense of close-to-the-ground and marginal, not in the sense of criminal.

<sup>76</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 80.

Foreknown: the Child bedded in straw,  
The mother kneeling over Him,  
The husband standing in belief

...and we are here  
As we have never been before,  
Sighted as not before, our place  
Holy, although we knew it not.<sup>77</sup>

Berry perceives his lowly stable as holy because it was in such a lowly place that Christ, the Creator himself, was born. Through this imaginative association, his farm has been “sighted as not before;” he imagines it as “holy, although we knew it not.” In Christ’s incarnation “Heaven” has crossed the threshold to become part of earth, renewing it and hallowing it. Berry writes similarly about Christ’s resurrection elsewhere. For example, in V, 2013, Berry describes how on Easter Sunday 2013,

On the morning of the first day  
the old shepherd comes early  
to the barn and finds the last  
of the season’s lambs newly born,  
safe, and thriving. It is the morning  
also of the resurrection of Jesus,  
the lamb of God, His people’s shepherd,

...And so the highest  
and the lowest stories are made one  
in his mind in his work, clumsily,  
difficult as may be, day by day.<sup>78</sup>

Berry’s disciplined Sabbath imagination allows him to perceive the correspondences between his barn and Christ’s tomb, between the new life of the lambs and Christ’s renewed life, and between Christ as shepherd and he himself as shepherd, both caring for their respective “people.” Berry works to unite these two stories of Heaven and Earth, to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 12.

think together the story of Christ's incarnation and resurrection with his own commitment to his farm, perceiving how he lives "day by day" on the holy threshold of Heaven.

#### **5.4.4 Heaven and Earth (2): Entering the Eternal Moment**

The second reason, according to Berry, that humans do not need to escape earth for heaven is that the creaturely practice of Sabbath provides an entrance into what Berry – following William Carlos Williams – calls the "eternal moment" of heaven, into "the one time, / the Sabbath time" (II, 2002).<sup>79</sup> In Berry's Sabbath poems on time and eternity, Berry suggests that the Sabbath is God-given rest of creation into which we can enter through our own practices of rest. In Sabbath poem XI, 2007 he writes,

The sounds of engines leave the air.  
The Sunday morning silence comes  
at last. At last I know the presence  
of the world made without hands.<sup>80</sup>

In the silence and away from the frenetic accoutrements of modern culture, Berry is more clearly able to perceive the earth as God's creation, "the world made without hands," and to glimpse the *telos* of this creation. The fulfillment of creation, for Berry, is found in the Sabbath, which both recalls the initial creation and points toward its recreation.

Reflecting on his Sabbath practice very early on, Berry writes in III, 1979,

To sit and look at light-filled leaves  
May let us see, or seem to see,  
Far backward as through clearer eyes  
To what unsighted hope believes:  
The blessed conviviality  
That sang Creation's seventh sunrise.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 225.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

The intentional practice of walking in the woods, seeking its creatures, and sitting in silence allows Berry to imagine the wholeness of creation before the Fall, “The blessed conviviality / That sang Creation’s seventh sunrise.” The Sabbath of the woods, reflected in the created order’s ongoing ecological fertility, recalls for Berry that “forfeit Garden” of Eden (II, 1982).<sup>82</sup> In the moments of earthly silence therein, he imaginatively perceives the inbreaking of Heaven’s Sabbath as “time fit / To be eternal” (II, 1982). When humans are able to enter and experience the eternal moment of Sabbath time, they also glimpse the traces of creation’s edenic order.

Berry writes in VIII, 2008, “Heaven is only present, instantaneous and eternal...complete forever in its hour.”<sup>83</sup> Berry is neither arguing that creation will somehow cease to be in time, nor that time is bad – this would denigrate the goodness of creation, since time is integral to creation. His point, rather, is that heaven, God, or the Kingdom of God is present to us most fully in these moments. We recall Berry’s rejection of the duality between earth and heaven. Humans do not need to leave the material, the timely, in order to experience the presence of God. Instead, the eternal fullness of God’s presence is experienced within time. Berry writes again in XIII, 2005,

Eternity is not infinity.  
It is not a long time.  
It does not begin at the end of time.  
It does not run parallel to time.  
In its entirety it always was.  
In its entirety it will always be.  
It is entirely present always.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 274.

Eternity, heaven, God, and Kingdom of God are terms that resonate with one another in Berry's poetry and are often synonyms gesturing towards the same reality: God's gracious presence in and to creation. The human recognition of this presence acknowledges the goodness, beauty, and graciousness of the given creation, and echoes God's delight and joy in his creation.

Although Berry understands the Sabbath moment as "timeless," it is crucial to recognize that he does not view the transience of creatures as a signal of their fallenness or lack of worth. As he argues in *V*, 2012,

The grass doth wither, the flower  
doth fade. I fear to dispute  
the Prophets, but it is ungrateful  
to complain, accounting  
brevity as a fault...

...the fleetingest blossoms  
of twinleaf and bloodroot also  
glorify God and are  
eternal in their moment.<sup>85</sup>

Each creature, from the lowliest fly and ephemeral blossom, brings glory and praise to God when it lives fully into the beauty of its momentary life by becoming what it was created to be. Each creature, by living into its calling to flourish within the limits of its creaturely nature, becomes a point of wholeness and holiness, of beauty and eternity. Berry's locally adapted imagination is able to perceive this eternal moment, which is "complete forever in its hour." The eternal moment is not an escape from creaturehood. Rather, creaturely wholeness and health are an entrance into it. And the creaturely rhythms and music of Berry's poetry itself – the form and craft discussed in chapter 4 –

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

help the reader enter the eternal moment, by encouraging her to slow down and catch a different rhythm.

#### **5.4.5 Hearing the Song Creation**

What humans learn to perceive by committing to place, confronting limits, imagining earth as the threshold of heaven, and by entering the eternal moment of the Sabbath is what Berry calls the “song of creation.” The metaphor of song seeks to capture the dynamic wholeness of the created order. As discussed in the previous chapter, Berry understands poetry and poetic speech to be rooted in rhythm and song. It is unsurprising, then, that the theme of song and singing features prominently in much of his Sabbath poetry. Various musical and musically related terms – such as song, singing, rhyme, rhythm, melody, and hymn – recur throughout. The song of creation shines forth through the singing of birds, streams, and trees. Berry uses musical terms and images both literally and metaphorically to describe the complex and dynamic life, pattern, and wholeness of creation. For example, from IV, 1982:

Thrush song, stream song, holy love  
That flows through earthly forms and folds,  
The song of Heaven’s Sabbath fleshed  
In throat and ear, in stream and stone.<sup>86</sup>

In this first line, the songs of the thrush and stream are likened to “holy love” embodied in the world. The Sabbath of heaven itself is enfleshed in the singer and the hearer, the water and the rock it beats upon. Although Berry rarely refers to God directly in his poetry, his understanding of God as speaking through creation and of God’s love as continually sustaining creation is clear. As he writes explicitly in IX, 1999,

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 38.

The incarnate Word is with us,  
is still speaking, is present  
always, yet leaves no sign  
but everything that is.<sup>87</sup>

Taken together, these poems suggest that the music of creation, the patterns of wholeness and beauty reflected therein, echoes the love and presence of Christ.

The theme of song and singing as an image of life is made clear at the end of XIV, 2013:

...The wrens, searching  
the brush for this day's food, rightly  
give not a thought to death, singing,  
as they live and move, the longest song.  
The Kingdom of God is life itself.<sup>88</sup>

For Berry, “the longest song” is the God-given life of creation itself, upheld by the one in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The birds “give not a thought to death,” but instead get on with the practicalities of living. In so doing, they participate in the wholeness and pattern of the life of creation, adding their song and pattern to its harmony. In the last line of the above poem, Berry makes clear the link between the life of creation and God the creator. As God’s creation, the earth is the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom subject to, sustained by, and beloved of God. Like the wrens who participate in the continual making and re-making of the long song of life, humans too participate in the life of creation, the life of God’s Kingdom, through their acts of making, acts ranging from art to agriculture.

In Berry’s Sabbath poetry, it is through rest, stillness, and silence that humans come to hear and sing the song of creation.<sup>89</sup> Berry’s very first Sabbath poem, I, 1979,

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>88</sup> Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 26.

introduces this connection. This poem opens with Berry walking and sitting among the trees. There, he writes, “All my stirring becomes quiet.”<sup>90</sup> Into this stillness “what is afraid of me comes,” presumably an animal, “and lives a while in my sight.” Soon, this animal’s fear leaves it and “it sings, and I hear its song.”<sup>91</sup> In the following stanza, an animal that Berry has feared comes “and lives a while in my sight.” This time, what Berry is afraid of in this animal leaves him, and then “it sings, and I hear its song.” In this time and place of stillness, of living before the other, Berry finds rest and experiences the “singing” – the very life – of creatures. This poem concludes with Berry finding his own song to sing. He writes,

After days of labor,  
mute in my consternations,  
I hear my song at last,  
And I sing it. As we sing,  
The day turns, the trees move.<sup>92</sup>

It is in silence, in rest, that Berry is able to perceive both creatures’ songs and his own. This “song” is a metaphor for the life of creation, of its joy, its patterns of renewal in the face of death, its praise of the creator, its “becoming what it is called to be,” to use Colin Gunton’s phrasing.

The theme of silence often juxtaposes and sets the stage for the theme of song.

Quiet is also a synonym, for Berry, of rest and Sabbath – rest of body, mind, and spirit, a

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<sup>89</sup> Although this theme is more prevalent from 1979 through the 1990s, Berry occasionally reprises it in the 2000s, often reflecting on actual birdsong and the “music” of the natural world. The theme of silence continues throughout, and is often paired with the theme of light, which has much resonance with the theme of song.

<sup>90</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 7.

<sup>91</sup> This animal may be an actual bird and thus may literally sing, but the identity of the animal doesn’t matter. Singing here is a larger metaphor for the life and pattern of creation, an animal living into its nature.

<sup>92</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 7.

relinquishing of dominance and ambition. It is in silence that one can hear, see, and perceive the songs of creation. As he writes in the very brief poem, I, 1997,

Best of any song  
is bird song  
in the quiet, but first  
you must have the quiet.<sup>93</sup>

Or in III, 2001,

Ask the world to reveal its quietude –  
not the silence of machines when they are still,  
but the true quiet by which birdsongs,  
trees, bellworts, snails, clouds, storms  
become what they are, and are nothing else.<sup>94</sup>

Creatures “become what they are” through the temporary silencing of human machinations and ever-consuming desire. Only by becoming quiet can humans perceive these deep rhythms and patterns of creation and each of its particulars; silence is the only possibility of learning to live in harmony with its rhythms, its song.

In the quiet of his own woods, the overgrown metaphorical ruins of Eden, Berry perceives “strewn remnants of the primal Sabbath’s hymn” (IV, 1979), the pattern of creation before the Fall.<sup>95</sup> On his walks in the woods, Berry witnesses the cycle of death and renewal that gives the land its fertility, its resurrection, “the life that steps and sings in ways of death.” Dead leaves rot and give their life for new leaves. For Berry, it is precisely this ever-renewing cycle of fertility that prefigures the renewal of creation. He writes in VI, 1979 that

Though creatures groan in misery,  
Their flesh prefigures liberty

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 12.

To end travail and bring to birth  
Their new perfection in new earth.<sup>96</sup>

“New earth” here refers literally to the new soil created from years of forest debris and metaphorically to the eschatological new creation. Further in the poem, in light of this joyous hint of “that enlivening,” Berry calls the trees of the woods to sing and the fields to rejoice: “Let praise rise out of the ground like grass” to “rejoin the primal Sabbath’s hymn.”<sup>97</sup> This vision of harmony between forest and field is a key correspondence to be addressed in the following chapter, which considers the relation of Berry’s Sabbath vision to Sabbath-worthy work and economy.

This ongoing song, the possibility of rejoining the Sabbath’s hymn, gives form and hope to the work of human beings. It is hope that, according to VI, 1982,

Out of disordered history  
a little coherence, a pattern  
comes, like the steadying  
of a rhythm on a drum, melody  
coming to it from time  
to time, waking over it,  
as from a bird at dawn.<sup>98</sup>

From time to time, humans may succeed in hearing the music of creation and responding in harmony to it through sympathetic micro-patterns of good work.

One of Berry’s best-known Sabbath poems is I, 1986, which features the oft-referenced phrase “a timbered choir.” This is also the title poem for his 1999 Sabbath collection, *A Timbered Choir: Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*. It concerns the return of the trees to portion of land “let alone.” The phrase “a timbered choir” appears in the second stanza:

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 41.

Patient as stars, they build in air  
Tier after tier a timbered choir,  
Stout beams upholding weightless grace  
Of song, a blessing on this place.<sup>99</sup>

To claim that Berry refers here merely to birds singing in the trees is too narrow an interpretation. That there are birds singing in Berry's woods is a given, as many of his poems attest. Yet the trees themselves, these "apostles of the living light," are also themselves a choir, singing a blessing upon the woods. They bring this blessing simply by existing – "their life's a benefaction made" – and by participating in the patterns of wholeness in creation – "And is a benediction said / Over the living and the dead" (I, 1986). Through the limit of human use, the trees returned in blessing to a piece of potentially overworked or ill worked land.

In closing, we should note that the theme of song also foreshadows the themes of the following chapter on Sabbath economy and Sabbath-worthy work. Once humans have learned to hear the song of creation, to honor creation's particulars, and to imagine earth as the threshold of heaven and entrance into the eternal moment, we must become worthy of this knowledge. Berry writes in III, 1983,

May our kind live to breathe  
Air worthy of the breath  
Of all singers that sing  
In joy of their making,  
Light of the risen year,  
Songs worthy of the ear  
Of breathers worth their air,  
Of workers worth their hire.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 52.

Like Israel, whose gift of the Promised Land entailed the expectation of worthy response, all humans must seek to become worthy of the gift we have been given in creation. The gift is not a reward for our faithfulness to our human calling, but we “must prove worthy of it afterwards; [we] must use it well, or [we] will not continue long in it.”<sup>101</sup> Berry prays that human work and engagement with creation be worthy of adding to the song of creation and worthy of being listened to.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

Chapters 5 and 6 seek to show how Berry’s Sabbath vision is an integrated and integrating vision of wholeness, one that intentionally imagines the holiness of place in relation to God and seeks the health of the place and its membership through Sabbath-worthy work. This chapter introduced four major themes in Berry’s Sabbath poetry in order to explore the rest side of his Sabbath vision. These were 1) approaching poetry as a place-based vocation, 2) confronting the limits of place through the practice of Sabbath, 3) perceiving the relationship between Heaven and Earth, and 4) hearing the song of creation.

Berry’s vision for Sabbath rest, as represented through these poems, offers the first part of an answer to his question: “How may a human come to rest?”<sup>102</sup> A human comes to rest, experiences the Sabbath, through, first, making a commitment to a place. The Sabbath poems reveal Berry as a placed poet, one who understands rest as a pilgrimage of depth and knowledge. When one is committed to place, the focus is on attending to particularities and details. Poetry assists Berry in engaging these details, with the

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<sup>101</sup> Berry, “The Gift of Good Land,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 296.

<sup>102</sup> Wendell Berry, *Leavings: Poems*, 29.

expectation that he might glimpse the Creator through them. Second, a human may come to rest through confronting the limits intrinsic to a place. For Berry, the woods serve as a physical and metaphorical limit to the work of his farm. Human rest and stillness are found in facing our limits. This experience assists one in finding one's place in the pattern and order of creation. Third, humans come to rest through imagining earth as the threshold of heaven and entering the eternal presence of the Sabbath. To imagine one's place as the threshold of heaven is to imagine it in its holiness, sanctity, and goodness in the eyes of God. Humans do not need to flee or reject the created order to find rest with God. Instead, rest with God is found through accepting the reality of God's presence within creation and seeking that presence through our own practices of rest. Fourth, humans may find rest in learning to hear the song of creation. This metaphor seeks to capture the dynamic life of the created order, the layering of many songs of many creatures, together comprising the song of creation in a particular place. By learning to hear this song, humans are called to rejoin creation's song and participate in the Sabbath hymn of all creation.

The following chapter will also address the four themes covered in this chapter, but in light of Berry's critiques of the consumer-industrial economy and the character of work and economy that his Sabbath vision implies and necessitates. Chapter 6 will show how the vision of Sabbath explored in this chapter implies an ethic of Sabbath-worthy work and economy.

## Chapter 6

### “How May a Human Being Come to Rest?”: Sabbath Economy and Sabbath-Worthy Work

*This is the Sabbath, the place, the rest,  
from which we go to work. From here  
the economies and politics of husbandry  
are quietly attested in the heart.<sup>1</sup>*

Wendell Berry

#### 6.1 Introduction

For Berry, the concept of Sabbath is evocative and demanding. It is the day that God rested from the work of creation. It is the day humans are called to keep and, in so doing, honor God’s rest. It is also the day on which humans are called to recognize the integrity and power of creation to renew itself. He comments,

We are to rest on the Sabbath also, I have supposed, in order to understand that the providence or the productivity of the living world, the most essential work, continues while we rest. This work is entirely independent of our work, and is far more complex and wonderful than any work we have ever done or will do. It is more complex and wonderful than we will ever understand.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, “VIII.19: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014,” *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2016), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), xxii.

Our rest teaches us that humans do not control or uphold the mystery that is God's creation. Creation is a gift and a conditional gift at that. Humans possess the land only when they remember and enact their kinship with it through good work.

Given that the Sabbath is focused on rest, many readers may be surprised how often the theme of work is the subject of Berry's Sabbath poems. This is because, for Berry, only a certain character of work leads to Sabbath rest. To close section nineteen of VIII, 2014, a section mainly comprising a detailed homage to the white penstemon flower and his delight of observing it, Berry writes "This is the Sabbath, the place, the rest, / from which we go to work."<sup>3</sup> The Sabbath is both the *telos* of work and the sensibility from which good work originates. Taking this line to heart, in the former chapter we focused on describing Berry's Sabbath vision of rest. Here, in the present chapter, we will "go to work" and focus on what Sabbath-worthy work and economy look like.

Together, chapters 5 and 6 argue that Berry's Sabbath vision is an integrated and integrating vision of wholeness, one that intentionally imagines the holiness of place in relation to God and, therefore, seeks the health of the place and its membership through Sabbath-worthy work. If the previous chapter explored the "rest" side of his vision – his calling for humans to attend to and learn to imagine the wholeness, life, and sanctity of the membership of the woods – this chapter explores the "work" side, the implications of the human work week for how Berry addresses the question: "How may a human being come to rest?"

In, I, 2004 – referring to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 – Berry writes,

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<sup>3</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 36.

...Is  
He living, then, his part  
Of Heaven's earthly life?  
And what shall be the art  
By which this sight can live?<sup>4</sup>

In order for humans to find Sabbath rest, to live their part in relation to “Heaven’s earthly life,” they must develop an “art” – practices of work and poetry that engage the created order – that expresses and supports the vision of Sabbath rest in the midst of toil. Sabbath rest is not just about taking moments of rest, but about cultivating a *life* – grounded in practices of making and economy – that is oriented towards the possibility of rest. Berry’s integrative imagination connects a vision of the human place in the created order with practices of work and economy via the practice of poetry. This is a fully integrated vision of human culture.

In this chapter we will explore, again through the Sabbath poems, Berry’s vision of human engagement with God’s creation: Sabbath-worthy work and Sabbath economy. We will argue that Berry’s vision of Sabbath rest – as represented in the previous chapter – orients his vision of human engagement with the created order, calling for Sabbath-worthy work and Sabbath economy. First, we will describe the “anti-Sabbath” imagination of the current consumer-industrial economy that Berry is resisting. Then we will explore the contours of Sabbath-worthy work and economy in relation to the four themes addressed in the previous chapter – placed poetic vocation, confronting limits, the relationship between heaven and earth, and hearing the song of creation – but in reverse order. We will see in Berry’s poetry that Sabbath-worthy work and economy 1) participate in the song of creation through harmony and healing, 2) imagine and honor

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<sup>4</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 250.

the wholeness of creation as a gift of heaven and seek respond to that gift through practices of love and affection, 3) look to the forest for life-giving patterns of relationality, and 4) cultivate virtues that lead to a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination that enables one to belong to one's place.

## **6.2 *The Consumer-Industrial Economy vs. The Great Economy***

### **6.2.1 Confronting an “Anti-Sabbath” Imagination**

In his Sabbath poems, Berry reflects upon his experience walking in the woods and his attempt to intentionally imagine his “boondock” place such that he sees “in it / the sanctity of all / creation in Heaven’s sight.”<sup>5</sup> While they are central, themes focused on Sabbath *rest* do not exhaust the themes found in the collection. Although more formally rendered than his workday poems,<sup>6</sup> many poems throughout the collection are concerned with *work* and related issues of agriculture, economy, and ecology. Berry’s Sabbath poems shift smoothly from observations about the plants and birds around him to the concerns of his farm and to his critiques of the consumer-industrial economy. Berry has been understood as a modern-day psalmist in reference to his poems of praise and lament,<sup>7</sup> yet this ascription is far more accurate than reviewers may have intended.

This is because some of Berry’s Sabbath poems are reminiscent of imprecatory psalms, in at least one place calling for damnation upon those who destroy the wholeness and beauty of the world. For example, from VI, 2010,

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<sup>5</sup> Wendell Berry, *Sabbaths 2013* (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 2015), 33.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to Berry’s poems that focus on farming and agriculture. Many can be found in Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Connelly, “*Sabbaths: Wendell Berry’s Songs of Praise*,” *Kentucky Philological Review* 3 (1988): 14.

But damn their bank accounts, inflated  
by the spent breath of the earth,  
of species forever changed to money.  
Let their legal falsehoods, corpses  
incorporated that cannot see  
or feel, think or care, that eat  
the world and shit money, fry  
in Hell in their own fat. May  
their incarnate steel and fire  
that destroy the mountains forever  
be damned. May the chemicals  
be damned that poison the rivers  
and damned too the alien slop and fume  
that spoil the air, the water, and all  
the living world, sold, soiled, or burned.<sup>8</sup>

Berry's vision of wholeness, holiness, and sanctity that we explored in the previous chapter is completely antithetical to a consumer-industrial economy "that eat[s] / the world and shit[s] money." Although some reviewers may dislike or be mystified by the inclusion of this and other such poems that oppose the nightmare of the war-industrial-complex, these poems are key for understanding Berry's positive Sabbath vision. Like psalms of praise that rest side-by-side with psalms of lament, terror, and anger, the Sabbath poems present a diverse but integrated vision of the human place in creation. These poems that focus on the "anti-Sabbath" reality of the consumer-industrial economy serve to connect Berry's Sabbath vision with human work and culture-making, calling for Sabbath-worthy work. The conclusion to VI, 2010 makes the relationship between the destructive economy and personal responsibility explicit:

if you condemn the dire shortcuts  
and devices of the engineers, confess  
that you condemn yourself. You too  
belong to that litter, and so must enter  
your guilty plea, and so must come

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<sup>8</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 349.

to your work. You must go ahead  
in opposition to the mechanical life,  
continuing also the creaturely task, longer  
than your life, of correcting yourself.<sup>9</sup>

Recognizing the holiness and brokenness of creation is not enough. Those who perceive the dissonance between culture and nature *must* take up the ongoing “creaturely task” of correcting and reorienting work, culture, and economy to be in harmony with the Sabbath vision of creation as sacred in Heaven’s sight.

Berry’s imagination, as chapter 4 discussed, is both integral and integrating, concerned to help a person become locally adapted to her place. In order to fully imagine and care for his beloved places, he must confront the anti-Sabbath imagination that threatens to destroy them. Thus, the “anti-poetic” themes and images of destructive practices and economies find their rightful place in this collection as easily as the poetic.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>10</sup> As Berry writes, “The required [locally adapted] language must be capacious enough to include ‘the anti-poetic’...because the anti-poetic exists. To leave it out would be to ignore ‘half the world.’ Besides, the needed poetry, if it is to exist, must be made poetic or beautiful by its art, not by its subjects” (Wendell Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011), 47–48).

Since Berry’s Sabbath poetry is organized chronologically, the poems that precede and follow the above cited VI, 2010 are – intentionally or not – its thematic opposite, focusing on the comings and goings of the little vireo.

V, 2010  
The red-eyed vireo  
who bent the lithe branch  
and fluttered the leaves,  
returning to her eggs,  
has disappeared. Her nest  
will fill with snow (348).

VII, 2010  
Blesséd be the vireo  
who, leaving, leaves

In order to perceive the contours of his Sabbath vision for rest and work, culture and economy, we will continue by considering Sabbath poems that identify and reject the anti-Sabbath imagination of the consumer-industrial economy to gain a clearer understanding of what a Sabbath economy and Sabbath-worthy work comprises.

The consumer-industrial economy, which Berry also calls a colonial economy, stands in stark contrast to a Sabbath vision of good human economies and practices of making. It is an anti-Sabbath economy that works against and diminishes the value of creation by ignoring its patterns of wholeness. It does not perceive itself as a little economy within the larger context of the created order, but as the *only* economy.<sup>11</sup> A totalizing economy, it that assumes that everything and everyone has a price and can thus be bought.<sup>12</sup> As Berry writes in III: “Look Out,” 2003,

Come to your windows, people of the world,  
look out at whatever you see wherever you are,  
and you will see dancing upon it that shadow.  
You will see that your place, wherever it is,  
your house, your garden, your shop, your forest, your farm,  
bears the shadow of its destruction by war  
which the is economy of greed which is plunder  
which is the economy of wrath which is fire.  
The Lords of War sell the earth to buy fire,  
they sell the water and air of life to buy fire.  
They are little men grown great by willingness  
to drive whatever exists into its perfect absence.

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not even a track (351).

This thematic juxtaposition poignantly captures Berry’s integrative vision, with V and VII, 2010 representing his focused practice of Sabbath attention to the world, bookending VI, 2010, a rejection of everything that threatens the vireo’s flourishing.

<sup>11</sup> Wendell Berry, “Two Economies,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 227.

<sup>12</sup> Wendell Berry, “The Idea of a Local Economy,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 257.

Their intention to destroy any place is solidly founded  
upon their willingness to destroy every place.<sup>13</sup>

If people have the eyes to see, they will recognize that every city, town, suburb, and farm bears the consequences and brokenness of the logic of the industrial economy: greed. The “Lords of War,” greedy captains of industry, get rich “upon their willingness to destroy every place.”

Berry prophetically calls the citizens of the world to shed their blinders and see how they are personally subject to these “Lords of War.” III: “Look Out,” 2003 continues,

Every household of the world is at their mercy,  
the households of the farmer and the otter and the owl  
are at their mercy. They have no mercy.  
Having hate, they can have no mercy.  
Their greed is the hatred of mercy.<sup>14</sup>

The homogenizing and obfuscating power of greed – “the hatred of mercy” – overcomes affection and care for particular places, peoples, and ecosystems. Greed destroys the complex, dynamic, and self-sustaining life of creation.

The logic of greed destroys even itself and what it seeks. This is because, as in XIII, 2008,

What greed builds is built  
by destruction of the materials  
and lives of which it is built.  
Only mourners survive.<sup>15</sup>

By rejecting any higher order or limit, the industrial economy sees itself as unaccountable to any outside values, standards, or orders. It is accountable only to its own values of

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<sup>13</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 239.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

efficiency, speed, and profit, and is therefore unable to comprehend the logic of mercy. The Lords of War have not realized or do not care that they do not set the terms of ultimate success. As Berry writes in IV, 1987,

For past and future's sake  
The terms of victory  
They cannot win or take  
Except by charity  
Toward what they cannot make.<sup>16</sup>

As we will see later in this chapter, mercy and love, among other virtues, are what enable the flourishing of creaturely life that comes only through familiarity, affection, and sympathy.

Yet greed prevails. Provocatively, Berry has called our consumer-industrial economy “an economy, and in fact a culture, of the one-night stand.”<sup>17</sup> He is not referring here to the hook-up culture, but to the insatiable relationship that our culture has with its food, products, and places. Americans, for the most part, have no idea where their products come from and where their waste is going. Food and consumables “appear” on store shelves and websites, disconnected from the persons and places from which they came and what was displaced to make their making possible. When we are finished with them, they then swiftly “disappear.” As Berry reflects in I, 2007,

The market is a grave  
Where goods lie dead that ought  
To live and grow and thrive,  
The dear world sold and bought  
To be destroyed by fire.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>17</sup> Berry, “The Whole Horse,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 297–98.

Our innumerable consumer goods are unable to enter into the nourishing cycle of fertility; they can only take from the past without giving to the future.

Berry emphasizes that since we are conditioned to have a “one-night stand” with our commodities, we find no satisfaction or sufficiency – requirements for rest – in their consumption.<sup>19</sup> Our consumer culture is predicated on promising satisfaction but cultivating dissatisfaction. People who are satisfied do not need to continually acquire new things. Dissatisfied consumers, on the other hand, continually purchase “new stuff on the promise of satisfaction because we have forgotten the promised satisfaction for which we bought our old stuff.”<sup>20</sup> People are not able to find satisfaction or rest in industrial commodities precisely because these commodities have no history and no future, only a quickly passing present. By relying on poorly made commodities, our culture produces objects that resist the development of affection and thus satisfaction because we “do not invest in them the lasting respect and admiration that make for satisfaction.”<sup>21</sup> Imagination, memory, and affection are paramount, then, for satisfaction and sufficiency, which lead to patterns of living that more closely reflect Berry’s Sabbath vision of rest and peace.

Yet, knowledge of history and quality of goods are impossible in the industrial economy as it so stands. As Berry mourns in XII, 2008, reflecting on Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,”

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<sup>19</sup> Berry, “The Whole Horse,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 236.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

We forget the land we stand on  
and live from. We set ourselves  
free in an economy founded  
on nothing, on greed verified  
by fantasy, on which we entirely  
depend...<sup>22</sup>

By forgetting the land on which all life truly depends, humans have set themselves “free” from knowledge and responsibility to place with the result that they are subsumed into the totalizing economy, one “on which we entirely depend.” Our desires and patterns of living are verified not by the standards and patterns of the created world, but by our own greedy and sinful fantasies. This is why Americans are unable to live economically and ecologically responsible lives within the current economic paradigm. Berry notes that the modern conservation effort tries this and fails.<sup>23</sup> It fails because “to be a consumer in the total economy, one must agree to be totally ignorant, totally passive, and totally dependent on distant supplies and self-interested suppliers.”<sup>24</sup> This is completely capitulating to the imagination of the consumer-industrial economy.

Berry believes that attempting to influence this economy from the inside will have limited success. Instead, he calls for a new economic paradigm – agrarianism<sup>25</sup> – that is

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<sup>22</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 327.

<sup>23</sup> “Somewhere near the heart of the conservation effort as we have know it is the romantic assumption that, if we have become alienated from nature, we can become unalienated by making nature the subject of contemplation or art, ignoring the fact that we live necessarily in and from nature – ignoring, in other words, all the economic issues that are involve” (Berry, “The Whole Horse,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 237). This critique is important because it applies to Gunton’s project. Merely putting art and science together is not enough – a new economic vision is needed that recognizes the fundamental human dependence on the created order.

<sup>24</sup> Berry, “The Idea of a Local Economy,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 259.

<sup>25</sup> Berry discusses five distinctive characteristics of agrarianism in his essay “The Whole Horse.” First, agrarianism is not primarily an idea but “a practice, a set of

defined by a vision of wholeness, holiness, and grace. An agrarian imagination is concerned with the themes of local adaption, attention, self-sufficiency, and limit. These themes are central to Berry's economic vision, much as they are central to his poetic vision. Finding and embodying a new economic pattern – one that lies in harmony with the Great Economy – is “our riddle / to which the answer is a life / that none of us has

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attitudes, a loyalty, and a passion” (Berry, “The Whole Horse,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 238). It is a way of thought and a mode of life based on land, and thus exists in stark contrast to industrialism's way of thought and mode of life based on money and technology. Second, agrarianism is intentionally both a culture and an economy, in contrast to industrialism, where culture is only a byproduct of the economy. Third, agrarian economies are rooted in particular places, particular people, and particular parcels of land. Intimacy with local histories and memories enables one to perceive the “local possibilities and impossibilities” (ibid., 239). This is in direct contrast to national or global economies where the scale is too large to care for and care about particulars. Whereas the industrial economy is principally concerned with quantity, agrarian economies are concerned with quality rooted in good work. Fourth, agrarian economies are highly diversified subsistence economies before they are market economies, enabling a degree of economic self-sufficiency and independence. Centering on the household, agrarian economies are rooted in the survival of family farms, ensuring a relative stability of the agrarian economy and community. Finally, agrarianism recognizes that the natural world is itself both pattern maker and final judge of human work. This recognition is rooted in affection and gratitude for creation's gifts and ramifies in various forms of good stewardship of and engagement with the natural world (ibid., 238–41).

Anticipating critiques of his vision, Berry explicitly confronts two questions: Is agrarianism simply a “phase” that we have grown out, and is agrarianism merely an attempt to “turn back the clock”? His answer to both is no. To the former he responds that although the industrial economy has overcome agrarian economies, it is also destroying each area of the natural world it touches. To leave agrarianism behind is to hasten a destruction of the earth. We cannot afford, therefore, to “outgrow” it. To the latter he responds that to the degree that agrarianism is concerned with local adaptation and attending to particular places, Americans have yet to actually develop widespread “stable, sustainable, locally adapted land-based economies.” America is even further from this possibility than it was a century ago; it is a goal that lies before us not behind (ibid., 242).

lived” (XII, 2008).<sup>26</sup> We now turn briefly to the theme of the Great Economy in Berry’s non-fiction before examining his Sabbath poetry.

## **6.2.2 Themes of Economy and Work in Berry’s Non-Fiction**

### *6.2.2.1 The Great Economy and an Imagination of Wholeness.*

The themes of economy and work – in contrast to the theme of Sabbath – are explicitly central to Berry’s non-fiction. Wendell Berry’s understanding of economy – in the original sense of *oikonomia*, the household economy, or all the ways in which humans work to be at home in the world – is rooted in the Christian affirmation of the Kingdom of God, or what he also calls the “Great Economy.”<sup>27</sup> This concept of economy is comprehensive enough to include everything in creation – people, land, sea, culture, insects, air, God, heaven, etc. It does not limit itself to what can be bought and sold, thus exploited and destroyed, as the industrial economy is wont to do. The Great Economy includes all of creation and imaginatively perceives how “everything in the Kingdom of God is joined both to it and to everything else that is in it.”<sup>28</sup> Berry’s vision thus emphasizes creaturely dependence and interdependence on the whole.

Yet, it also presumes that humans, because they are not God, cannot know or understand the “whole pattern or order” in which they exist. Mystery and ignorance are

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<sup>26</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 327.

<sup>27</sup> Berry, “Two Economies,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Berry’s use of the related term Great Economy is an intentionally “culturally neutral” term for the Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God (ibid., 221). As Berry goes on to write, “we can name it whatever we wish, but we cannot define it except by way of a religious tradition” (ibid., 221).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 220.

inescapable.<sup>29</sup> As a God-given order and a concept given shape by the scriptures, the term Kingdom of God “suggest[s] the difficulty of our condition,” both as limited and fallen creatures, and “impl[ies] a fairly complete set of culture-borne instructions for living in it.”<sup>30</sup> In developing this concept, Berry draws on Israel’s and the Church’s experiences with God in the Old and New Testaments. These experiences, as they deal with persons in places, are both implicitly and explicitly ecological. The institution of the Sabbath, for example, in addition to ordering right worship, showed the Israelites “the limited efficacy of their work” and thus their ongoing dependence on God and the land.<sup>31</sup> Although humans cannot comprehend the whole order of the Kingdom of God, they can severely violate it, incurring severe penalties for both people and the land.

For Berry, the Kingdom of God is not a disembodied spiritual reality but an embodied and placed spiritual reality. Thus, the Kingdom of God or Great Economy, for Berry, is an actual, practical economy: “It includes principles and patterns by which values or powers or necessities are parceled out and exchanged.”<sup>32</sup> Yet, it is “both known and unknown, visible and invisible, comprehensible and mysterious.”<sup>33</sup> As an economy that includes all of physical and invisible reality, humans cannot comprehend it, and require the assistance of the imagination. Humans participate in the Great Economy only indirectly through human cultural production amidst limited knowledge and power.

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<sup>29</sup> Recall what was said in chapter 4 about human ignorance as a matter of *form*, not *knowledge*. Human ignorance will not be fixed through the accumulation of more information.

<sup>30</sup> Berry, “Two Economies,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 220.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 6.2.2.2 *Human Economy as the Work of Culture-Making*

Berry's characterization of economy is not equivalent with that of the contemporary finance industry. "Economy in its original – and, I think, its proper – sense refers to household management. By extension, economy refers to the husbanding of all the goods by which we live."<sup>34</sup> Household economies are closely connected to and nested within local economies because human culture-making, for Berry, is rooted in the "low culture" of "land use, life support, healing, housekeeping, homemaking."<sup>35</sup> This is the basis of economy, "the *arts* of adapting kindly the many human households to the earth's many ecosystems and human neighborhoods."<sup>36</sup> The adaptation of human economies to the Great Economy is the "primary vocation and responsibility" of every human being, both those in cities and in rural areas.<sup>37</sup>

Humanity's necessary but indirect participation in the Great Economy happens by way of socially constructed human economies, "a narrow circle within which things are manageable by the use of our wits."<sup>38</sup> Economy is a central way Berry characterizes human cultural-making. All human economies – or as Berry calls them "little economies" – operate within and in dependence on the Great Economy. A little economy can either fit itself within and in harmony with the pattern and order of the Great Economy, or reject the limits inherent in the Great Economy's pattern.

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<sup>34</sup> Wendell Berry, "It All Turns on Affection," in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Berry, "Two Economies," in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 222.

A helpful image, drawn from William Blake, which Berry uses in his non-fiction to illustrate the potential relationship between these two economies, is that of “wheel without wheel” or “wheel within wheel.”<sup>39</sup> “Wheel without wheel” is the image of two cogwheels moving in opposite directions, where one wheel moves the other but only in a direction different from its own because they are outside one another. This is an image of the industrial economy that destroys what it uses. In contrast to this image is “wheel within wheel,” the image of two cogwheels moving in harmony, one within the other, both smoothly rotating in the same direction. Little economies should aim, analogously, to be a “wheel within wheel,” working with the patterns of the Great Economy.

The industrial economy, as “wheel without wheel,” has no natural limits. Berry stresses, however, that no little economy can succeed by any practical measure without defining and observing limits. Widening one’s view to perceive and imagine that of the Great Economy – the whole created order – one understands that, particularly in light of our global economy, any damage to the land and its people in one place affects the whole. This is why the comprehensive view of the Great Economy, the Kingdom of God, is so important for Berry. It contextualizes little economies, providing limits, patterns, values, and standards of evaluation. It recognizes that there is no practical success without the interconnected and interdependent success of the whole. Cultures cannot ultimately flourish on the backs of other humans or by destroying land. They can flourish only by moving in sympathy, “wheel within wheel.” The Great Economy for Berry, then, is about

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

*membership* in a common community of creation, not about the “sum of its parts.”<sup>40</sup> This membership includes, of course, the human as well as the non-human creation.

### **6.3 *Berry’s Poetic Vision of Sabbath Economy and Sabbath-Worthy Work***

In his non-fiction, Berry writes often of the differences between good work and bad work. As we discussed in chapter 4, Berry believes that “all of us are makers,” and in this way “everybody is an artist – either good or bad, responsible or irresponsible. Any life, by working or not working, by working well or poorly, inescapably changes other lives and so changes the world.”<sup>41</sup> Good work and responsible making will be guided by a loving and affectionate imagination. Good care and work require the combination of good intentions, good information, and good character – affections, habits, values and virtues.<sup>42</sup> Love and affection provide a life-giving shape to human work. This shape suggests both limits to live within and quality of work to aim for. Good work embodies a Sabbath imagination. It is labor that orients the six-day week toward Sabbath rest.

We ended the previous chapter by exploring the relationship between the song of creation and good work. Berry hopes that humans will

...live to breathe  
Air worthy of the breath  
Of all singers that sing  
In joy of their making,  
Light of the risen year,  
Songs worthy of the ear  
Of breathers worth their air,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>41</sup> Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 316.

<sup>42</sup> Berry, “People, Land, and Community,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 188.

Of workers worth their hire (III, 1983).<sup>43</sup>

The sections that follow address the four themes of the previous chapter – placed poetic vocation, confronting limits, the relationship between heaven and earth, and hearing the song of creation – but in reverse order. We will see in Berry’s poetry that Sabbath-worthy work and economy 1) participate in the song of creation through harmony and healing, 2) imagine and honor the wholeness of creation as a gift of heaven and seek respond to that gift through practices of love and affection, 3) look to the forest for life-giving patterns of relationality, and 4) cultivate virtues that lead to a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination that allows one to belong to one’s place.

### **6.3.1 Participating in the Song of Creation: Good Work, Harmony, and Healing**

#### *6.3.1.1 Good Work as Sabbath-Worthy Work*

One aim of Sabbath rest for Berry is learning to perceive and imagine the song of creation. In Berry’s poetry, “song” and “singing” are often metaphors for the life of creation, its patterns of renewal and fertility, the flourishing of its creatures, and the creatures’ joy in living. Creation’s song is heard in silence, both the literal silencing of words and the metaphorical silencing of human ambition and greed. Humans can then craft their own song, their life and work, in response. After experiencing the song of creation through practices of rest, silence, and attention (e.g., walking, poetry, etc.), humans are then called to live into this vision, imagining patterns of work and economy that are sympathetic to the patterns of their places.

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<sup>43</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 52.

Finding the song of creation within and despite ecological destruction is difficult.

Thus, Berry prays in X, 2002,

Teach me work that honors Thy work,  
the true economies of goods and words,  
to make my arts compatible  
with the songs of the local birds.<sup>44</sup>

Fundamentally for Berry, “Good human work honors God’s work.”<sup>45</sup> The Great Economy is the ultimate context for all “true economies of goods and words.” Work that honors God’s work in creation is the work of arts, crafts, and labor that is compatible and sympathetic with the lives of “the local birds” – which is to say locally adapted to patterns of wholeness or potential wholeness in the local landscape. Bad work is blasphemous because it works against the integrity and wholeness of creation, “mak[ing] shoddy work of the work of God.”<sup>46</sup> When creation, understood as a particular piece of land under one’s feet, is respected as holy and as embodying God’s presence and Spirit, Berry believes that such blasphemous work is rendered impossible.<sup>47</sup> Good work is respectful and loving of its tools, it honors creation’s mystery and power, it unites life, work, pleasure and affection, it is both useful and beautiful, and it places itself under the tutelage and judgment of the natural world, the patterns of the Great Economy.<sup>48</sup>

This vision of good work that honors God’s work within the Great Economy undergirds a Sabbath economy. In II, 1983, Berry likens his vision of a Sabbath economy to a dynamic dance:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>45</sup> Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 312.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Calling again to mind  
The grace of circumstance,  
Sabbath economy  
In which all thought is song,  
All labor is a dance.  
The world is made at rest,  
In ease of gravity.  
I hear the ancient theme  
In low world-shaping song  
Sung by the falling stream.<sup>49</sup>

Song, dance, grace, and rest characterize a Sabbath economy. The various juxtapositions between thought and song, labor and dance, and making and rest signal to the reader how far from the standard conception of the consumer economy we have come. The consumer-industrial economy is an economy of greed and fire that consumes all places in the name of “more.” Rest, ease, song, and dance – like mercy – have no lasting place in the industrial economy. In contrast, a Sabbath economy is an economy of grace that encompasses silence and song, rest and work. Both sides of the comparison are integral to the “world-shaping song” of creation that brings life from death.

The close of this poem brings two more juxtapositions. Reflecting on the cycle of forest fertility in the form of a rotting log in the stream, Berry suggests counter-intuitively that “falling founts, / Unmaking makes the world.”<sup>50</sup> The falling stream has brought a dead log downstream where it gives forth new life as it becomes a host for the growth of new plants. This example illustrates how the labor of the forest is a “dance” between the dead and the living, the “dance” of “unmaking” that “makes the world” new. This ongoing dance underlies the “ever-forming form” of God’s creation (VIII.13: “A Small

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<sup>49</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Porch in the Woods,” 2014).<sup>51</sup> Thus, a Sabbath economy is also an “economy of gifts,” and according to Berry, “the only economy that will last” (VIII.22: “A Small Porch in the Woods, 2014).<sup>52</sup> It is an economy of gifts because its life is “founded” “at the cost of death” (II, 1983).<sup>53</sup> This cycle of return exhibits “the ancient theme / In low world-shaping song,” the patterns upon which human economies should work in harmony with (II, 1983).<sup>54</sup>

### 6.3.1.2 *Sabbath-Worthy Work Seeks Harmony*

“Harmony” is the key musical metaphor for understanding the human vocation as portrayed in Berry’s Sabbath poetry. Trees, for example, participate in the song of creation by nature. Human are fallen and, subsequently, harmony does not happen automatically between humans and the rest of the created order. Humans, therefore, must diligently work to construct a culture and economy that is in harmony with creation’s order.

For example, in I, 2008 Berry, reflects on a moment where he glimpses the harmony he is seeking. One early spring afternoon he walked into his barn and found his two horses, one black, and one white,

...lying in the warm  
shine on a bed of dry hay.  
They lie side by side,  
identically posed as a painter  
might imagine them:  
heads up, ears and eyes  
alert. They are beautiful in the light

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<sup>51</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 29.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 51.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

and in the warmth happy. Such  
harmonies are rare. This is  
not the way the world is. It is a possibility  
nonetheless deeply seeded  
within the world. It is  
the way the world is sometimes.<sup>55</sup>

The world as we find it is not one of perfect harmony. Determined by the anti-Sabbath imagination of the cultural-industrial economy, human beings are currently consuming and destroying the earth in direct connection to their dissonant patterns of work and economy. This is why the economic response to the destruction of earth is “our riddle / to which the answer is a life / that none of us has lived” (XII, 2008).<sup>56</sup> None of us has successfully lived out the answer to our consumer-industrial economic problem. Yet Berry hopes that such an economy can be implemented: “It is a possibility / nonetheless deeply seeded / within the world.” Although examples of the deep pattern of harmony and self-sufficiency in creation may be rare, they are not nonexistent. “It is,” indeed, “the way the world is sometimes.” Recognizing these moments requires practices of attention – as Berry exhibits with his weekly walks and poetic writing – to form the imagination and to keep one awake to the world’s possibilities.

Berry establishes his vision of harmony as the goal of human work and agriculture early in the collection. After experiencing “the memory of Paradise” on the Sabbath, Berry writes in VII, 1979, “Disharmony recalls us to our work.” He finds this transition jarring. He continues,

It is a hard return from Sabbath rest  
To lifework of the fields, yet we rejoice,  
Returning, less condemned in being blessed

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 327.

By vision of what human work can make:  
A harmony between forest and field,  
The world as it was given for love's sake,  
The world by love and loving work revealed

As given to our children and our Maker,  
In that healed harmony the world is used  
But not destroyed, the Giver and the taker  
Joined, the taker blessed, in the unabused

Gift that nurtures and protects. Then workday  
And Sabbath live together in one place.  
Though mortal, incomplete, that harmony  
Is our one possibility of peace.<sup>57</sup>

“Our one possibility of peace” within the created order is somehow to reintegrate the currently fragmented existence of rest and work, such that our workday reflects, nurtures, and leads to Sabbath rest. Such a life is marked by use without abuse, use that preserves the gift. As we explored in the previous chapter, “Order is the only possibility of rest.”<sup>58</sup> Our experience of the rest, peace, and grace of the Sabbath – and through grace perceiving the gracious order of creation – provides an imagination-forming vision by which to order our work. The ultimate goal is that our work will be an analogy of our rest and our rest an analogy of our work. “When we work well,” Berry writes in X, 1979, “a Sabbath mood / Rests on our day, and finds it good.”<sup>59</sup>

Like the practices of keeping Sabbath and writing poetry, human artifacts that sympathize and harmonize with the created order perceive and uphold limits. The order of the field is very different from the order of the forest, yet there are human-ordered

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>58</sup> Wendell Berry, “Healing,” in *What Are People For?* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 12.

<sup>59</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 20.

fields that exist in relative harmony with the order of the forest. The very possibility of harmony requires that the field respect and uphold the space and existence of the forest. The farmer must limit the field and work within that clearly defined limit. Berry continues,

When fields and woods agree, they make a rhyme  
That stirs in distant memory the whole  
First Sabbath's song that no largess of time  
Or hope or sorrow wholly can recall.<sup>60</sup>

Here Berry draws on another musical term, *rhyme*. As we discussed in chapter 4, rhyme has to do with rhythm and mood. Rhyme is also a form of harmony in words. Consonants and vowels are paired in ways that play off one another. Rhyme is a way of joining and relating words or phrases together. The song that field and wood make together comes through their playing off one another, relating to one another. They are not exactly the same but follow the same rhythm and mood, each in their own particular way. Often in the Sabbath collection, Berry uses rhyme in the sense of one year's work rhyming with the previous year's work, linking it to the theme of renewal and care.

Berry's vision of Sabbath-worthy work is a vision of human engagement with creation where "change is made / without violence to the ground" (VI, 1982).<sup>61</sup> Such use without abuse joins us in relationship to the Creator. Since humans cannot live without acting, Berry's concern is to learn to act without violence, learn the limits of creation and make our farms and economies "elaborations of elegance" within the limits of creation.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 41.

6.3.1.3 *Sabbath-Worthy Work Heals the Song of Creation*

Much of Berry's work explores the lack of limits and boundaries that stimulate the ongoing destruction wrought by the consumer-industrial economy. He is fond of reminding his readers, anti-nostalgically, that there is no way to return to an earlier time where the land is whole. As quoted above, "No largess of time / Or hope or sorrow wholly can recall" (VII, 1979) that first Sabbath's order and goodness.<sup>62</sup> We must start with what we find, and in our place look for the hints of this "primal Sabbath's hymn" (IV, VI, 1979).<sup>63</sup> Through our good, patient, and responsive work we then seek to bring,

Out of disordered history  
a little coherence, a pattern  
comes, like the steadying  
of a rhythm on a drum, melody  
coming to it from time  
to time, waking over it,  
as from a bird at dawn.<sup>64</sup>

Humans can begin only where they find themselves. They can attend to the patterns of the place and aim to work in such a way as to reknit patterns of wholeness in contradistinction to patterns of brokenness, oppression, and exploitation. The vision of Sabbath wholeness helps people identify those places where the wholeness is broken and creatures – both human and non-human – are hurting. This process of bringing back the song and order of creation, specific to a place, takes imagination, commitment, compassion, and hard work. The only way to bring back "a little coherence" is to replace bad work with good work, which requires adopting practices of attention.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 11, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 41.

In Berry's case, he started with a damaged, over-plowed, and rain-washed hillside, one that, even after decades of care, still bears the scars of its mistreatment. But, as his father told him, "this land responds to good treatment" (XI, 2010).<sup>65</sup> Berry sees in his farm a little more coherence now than there was when he and his wife moved there. The rhythm of the farm, its song, has grown perceptibly closer to that of the forest through their care and attention. And it is not that Berry has not made his own mistakes. The difference is that he has committed to staying in place in order to work to heal his mistakes.

In VI, 1982, a poem written to his son Den, Berry describes a field that he and his son cleared together – or re-cleared, as the poem alludes to a previously disastrous period of use when those who first cleared the field

saw them go to ruin, learned nothing  
from the trees they saw return  
to hold the ground again.<sup>66</sup>

This time, when Berry and Den cleared the field, they made it "at no cost to the world" and "without violence to the ground."<sup>67</sup> Their use attempts to bring "out of disordered history / a little coherence," a renewal of patterns in harmony with the forest.<sup>68</sup> Their use of this land in harmony with the forest from which it came includes the healing of both land and farmer. As Berry explains,

There are two healings: nature's,  
and ours and nature's. Nature's  
will come in spite of us, after us,  
over the graves of its wasters, as it comes

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

to the forsaken fields. The healing  
that is ours and nature's will come  
if we are willing, if we are patient,  
if we know the way, if we will do the work.  
My father's father, whose namesake  
you are, told my father this, he told me,  
and I am telling you: we make  
this healing, the land's and ours:  
it is our possibility. We may keep  
this place, and be kept by it.<sup>69</sup>

As part of the membership of creation, Sabbath worthy-work not only helps to renew the patterns of creation – which as Berry reminds us “will come in spite of us, after us” – but also integrates humans into the pattern of creation. Good human work becomes part of the matrix of healthy relations that characterize the wholeness of a place. Since human health and wholeness depend upon the health of the created order, human healing comes along with the healing of places. Without us, creation will slowly renew her own song, but only if the damage humans have wrought is not too severe. To participate in this healing, humans must have willingness, patience, knowledge, and commitment. Only by working along with creation “we may keep / this place, and be kept by it.”

### **6.3.2 Heaven and Earth (1): Fulfillment of Sabbath Vision is a Gift of Heaven**

#### *6.3.2.1 The Gift of Creation*

Foundational to Berry's work is his commitment to perceiving his “backwater,” “boondock” place, imaginatively, as the threshold of heaven and as a potential entrance into “the eternal moment,” an experience of the peace and grace of Heaven. For Berry, we do not find God or heaven by escaping the earth and material things, but by living

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 42.

responsibly with them in economies founded on grace and mercy. Berry writes in VII, 1982,

We join our work to Heaven's gift,  
Our hope to what is left,  
That field and woods at last agree  
In an economy  
Of widest worth.  
High Heaven's Kingdom come on earth.  
Imagine Paradise.  
O dust, arise!<sup>70</sup>

The life of creation is "Heaven's gift." Sabbath-worthy work honors this gift. Beginning wherever we find ourselves, our only hope for the future of creation is our ability to place ourselves within the patterns of creation, so "that field and woods at last agree." To imagine earth as the threshold of heaven is to see and "Imagine Paradise," it is to perceive the potential fullness of creation's life suggested by the health and wholeness of our homes and communities within the context of the Great Economy. This would truly be, for Berry, the coming of the "High Heaven's Kingdom" on earth, for "The Kingdom of God is life itself" (XIV, 2013).<sup>71</sup>

Berry writes in IX: "The Farm," 1991 of the vision of this "Paradise" that he sees on his Sabbath walk when he looks down onto his farm from the hill: "The possibility / Of human life whose terms / Are Heaven's and this earth's."<sup>72</sup> The vision is perceived by the joining of Heaven's Sabbath to this particular piece of land with its particular strengths and weaknesses and by imagining this land as sacred and beloved by God – the threshold of heaven. As the closing of VII, 1979 notes,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>71</sup> Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 115.

But harmony of earth is Heaven-made,  
Heaven-making, is promise and is prayer,  
A little song to keep us unafraid,  
An earthly music magnified in air.<sup>73</sup>

The Creator has endowed the created order with its own order and integrity. It is an order, as we saw in the previous chapter, which can only be understood by being imagined in light of its relationship with God and heaven. As Berry expresses in this poem, the harmony human work and economy are aiming for is both “Heaven-made” – in the sense that its patterns have been established outside of itself – and “Heaven-making” – in the sense that by being guided by this vision on earth we are anticipating and witnessing to the future of creation.

The Sabbath vision of peace – of harmony between field and forest, earth and heaven, humans and God – “is promise and is prayer.”<sup>74</sup> It is what we hope for and work towards when we do the hard work of adding “a little coherence” to the pattern of creation.<sup>75</sup> Our experience of “the eternal moment” is our orienting guide:

This is the Sabbath, the place, the rest,  
from which we go to work. From here  
the economies and politics of husbandry  
are quietly attested in the heart.<sup>76</sup>

And also,

Whatever is foreseen in joy  
Must be lived out from day to day,  
Vision held open in the dark  
By our ten thousand days of work.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>76</sup> Berry, “VIII.19: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014,” in *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 36.

<sup>77</sup> Berry, “X, 1979,” in *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 20.

The grace, peace, joy, rest, and wholeness experienced by Berry on his Sabbath walks are only the beginning. They are “the place...from which we go to work,” the vision that “Must be lived out from day to day...By our ten thousand days of work.” The ending of VII, 1979 also reminds human workers of their limitedness – the harmony we seek and establish is only “A little song.”<sup>78</sup> It is not the whole song or the final song, but a gift to “keep us unafraid” as we live our lives on this broken earth.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, although Berry’s Sabbath vision requires persons to do good work and organize life-giving patterns of economy, he is clear that the power to heal the wholeness in a place is not ultimately a human power. He writes in VI, 1982,

Though we invite, this healing comes  
in answer to another voice than ours;  
a strength not ours returns  
out of death beginning in our work.<sup>80</sup>

The poem remains ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, about the identity of this other voice. It is almost certainly the voice of creation that is renewing her song. Yet, in other places Berry suggests that Nature personified is the “appointed vicar” of God, working under God’s power. As he describes in XIII, 2011, Nature is

...God’s appointed vicar,  
our mother and judge, who binds  
us each to each, the largest  
to the least, in the family of all  
the creatures: great Nature  
by whom all are changed, none  
are wasted, none are lost.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 373.

God enables and frees creation to be the “supreme artist of this / our present world” (XIII, 2011).<sup>82</sup> It is God’s love and light that weaves through the patterns of creation. At God’s behest and for his good pleasure, Nature acts as vicar, mother, and judge, uniting human beings to the networks of creatures around the world. Within the Great Economy of creation, “none / are wasted, none are lost.” All lives are honored. Out of death comes life.

The personification of creation as Nature, the vicar of God, appears again in XV, 2015, where Berry describes the beautiful life cycle of the leaves in the forest as exhibiting the beauty of God and care of creation.

The year is showing forth  
of the heavenly love that is  
the being of the present world.  
The leaves, opening and at last  
falling, hold a while  
the beauty of God who made them  
by the work and care of Nature,  
His vicar and our mother.  
His only is the light  
of which all things are made,  
the beauty that they are,  
the delight that is our prayer.<sup>83</sup>

The beauty of the forest shows that God is both beautiful and makes his creation beautiful through the agency and mediation of the created order. The Sabbath light of creation is the light of God, and “his only is the light / of which all things are made.” God’s light is “the beauty that they are,” and his light is “the delight that is our prayer.” We delight in the Sabbath light when we attend to our work in such a way as to heal the song of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 73.

creation through Sabbath-worthy work that harmonizes with the patterns and wholeness of creation.

### **6.3.3 Heaven and Earth (2): Responding to Heaven's Gifts with Gratitude, Love, and Affection**

#### *6.3.3.1 Gratitude Embodied through Sabbath-Worthy Work*

In Berry's vision of creation, the Creator has offered humans the world in love and mercy, to be engaged through homemaking, arts, and economies. Humans respond to this gift by returning God's love in work lovingly rendered, work that recalls and remembers the song of creation. Good work and sympathetic little economies honor the holiness and wholeness of creation by embodying gratitude through good work. Berry opens Sabbath poem IV: "Amish Economy," 1995, with the call to align our work and our gratitude.

We live by mercy if we live.  
To that we have no fit reply  
But working well and giving thanks,  
Loving God, loving one another,  
To keep Creation's neighborhood.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to the industrial economy – governed by the "Lords of War" who "have no mercy," while placing "every household of the world...at their mercy" (III: "Look Out," 2003)<sup>85</sup> – a Sabbath economy is founded on grace, love, and mercy. "We live by mercy if we live," as Berry writes in "Amish Economy." Grace, love, and mercy cannot be repaid; these are not items on a balance sheet that can be equaled out. Instead, it is fitting to respond to the mercy of creation and Creator with good work and gratitude. This is not an accounting of debt but of joy and fullness expressed by "loving God, loving one

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<sup>84</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 160.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

another / To keep Creation's neighborhood." "To keep" a place is to care for it and to act lovingly towards it.<sup>86</sup>

Berry is adamant that our gratitude and thanksgiving for God's merciful gift of creation be embodied in appropriate actions toward our places and the people in our places. In IX: "The Farm," 1991 Berry writes,

...Be thankful and repay  
Growth with good work and care.  
Work done in gratitude,  
Kindly, and well is prayer.  
You did not make yourself,  
Yet you must keep yourself  
By use of other lives.  
No gratitude atones  
For bad use or too much.<sup>87</sup>

Gratitude itself, as a feeling, is not enough. Gratitude must be embodied through good work and caring action. Since "no gratitude atones / For bad use or too much," we must learn to work in harmony with our place. We could say that it is not gratitude that atones for bad use but repentance and change of lifestyle. Gratitude is worked out through action when "you make yourself a way / For love to reach the ground" (IX: "The Farm," 1991).<sup>88</sup>

#### 6.3.3.2 *Sabbath-Worthy Work Guided by Affection and Pleasure*

Recall that Berry understands the practice of Sabbath as entrance into "the eternal moment" of heaven and into "the one time, / the Sabbath time" (II, 2002).<sup>89</sup> This "Sabbath time" represents in Berry's poetry the wholeness of God's intention for his

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<sup>86</sup> See also Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 119.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

creation. Entering the eternal moment is akin to being fully and completely present to the place you are in; it is concentrated attention and delight in the “thisness” or particularity of your place. Berry uses the image of love to nuance his understanding of the eternal Sabbath moment. He writes in VIII.18: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014,

Love is the crisis of our work.  
When the watcher speaks of love  
he is speaking not of history, not  
of past or future, but of the love  
in which all time has moved, in which  
all things were and are and are to be,  
the love that is before the beginning,  
that is beyond the end, that is  
entirely present as the flower of a day.<sup>90</sup>

God’s love is always fully present to his creation at every moment. This love has a past and a future in time – “in which all time has moved...the love that is before the beginning, / that is beyond the end,” – but is always experienced in the present moment.

“Love,” as “the crisis of our work,” is important for guiding the work of homemaking and culture-making because it requires certain “patterns of value and restraint, principle and expectation, memory, familiarity, and understanding that, inwardly, add up to *character* and, outwardly, to *culture*.”<sup>91</sup> These cultural patterns – which cultivate a sympathetic and disciplined imagination – orient human action toward love. In XIII, 2010, Berry likens his local place to a battered wife bereft of love and care, abused by those who depend upon her:

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<sup>90</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 34.

<sup>91</sup> Berry, “People, Land, and Community,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 185. Emphasis in original.

O my own small country, battered  
wife of my kind, made in time  
by life and its multiple ends,  
dying and rising again,  
you come to mere use, which is  
misuse by life self-estranged.  
Life is not of the body,  
For death disembodies it,  
and yet it suffers. Only life  
suffers, as you suffer  
use without care or thanks.  
They who abuse you live  
by your life, they thrive  
a while by your ruin.  
But now let us think instead  
of a husband and a wife, one  
flesh, whose flesh is one  
with their place, grace  
unearned, your gift, by which  
they are made your own.<sup>92</sup>

Instead of a “battered / wife” in an estranged relationship with her spouse, Berry invites us to think of the land as a relationship between husband and wife who are of “one / flesh, whose flesh is one / with their place.” Living by the ruin of another – persons, creatures, or land – will lead to one’s own ruin. To live in harmony with one’s place is grace, a gift unearned but one that supports the flourishing of all life. The relationship between humans and the land should image that of spouses who are of one flesh, where love implies and imposes limits so not to injure the beloved. Since much of the land is currently battered, love for it demands feelings and thoughts be turned into actions of care and attention.

Love must be practiced in order to be love. This insight leads Berry to question the practical aspects of loving one’s neighbor. He notes that real love “must come to acts,

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<sup>92</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 357.

which must come from *skills*.”<sup>93</sup> Unless you possess real and helpful skills you can merely smile friendly at your neighbor. You have nothing of practical substance to offer her. At the close of IV: “Amish Economy,” 1995 – which calls us to work well, give thanks, love God, and love one another – Berry describes an Amish farmer at the end of the day.

But now, in summer dusk, a man  
Whose hair and beard curl like spring ferns  
Sits under the yard trees, at rest,  
His smallest daughter on his lap.  
This is because he rose at dawn,  
Cared for his own, helped his neighbors,  
Worked much, spent little, kept his peace.<sup>94</sup>

This farmer is able to find rest – which in this collection always points to creation’s Sabbath rest and peace – because he worked hard caring for his land, his family, and his neighbors. This farmer has lived into the call from the opening of the poem, working faithfully to express love for God and neighbor. Skill and good work particularizes and embodies love and affection. A person cannot act in love toward a neighbor if she has not the skill nor ability to help, since “there is no use in helping our neighbors with their work if we do not know how to work.”<sup>95</sup> Skill allows for good work because “skill, in the best sense, is the enactment or the acknowledgment or the signature of responsibility to other lives; it is the practical understanding of value. Its opposite is not merely unskillfulness, but ignorance of sources, dependences, relationships.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Berry, “The Gift of Good Land,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 298. Emphasis added.

<sup>94</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 161.

<sup>95</sup> Berry, “Two Economies,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 234.

<sup>96</sup> Berry, “The Use of Energy,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 289.

Once more, however, Berry's Sabbath poetry suggests that the power to fulfill the marital vision in XIII, 2010 comes from God. In I, 2005 for example, Berry writes,

I know that I have life  
only insofar as I have love.

I have no love  
except it come from Thee.

Help me, please, to carry  
This candle against the wind.<sup>97</sup>

This poem is Berry's humble acknowledgement of his limits. The love that is necessary for a life characterized by Sabbath-worthy work, that limits and disciplines human desire, and that guides patterns of art making, originates with God.

#### **6.3.4 The Sabbath of the Woods: Sabbath-Worthy Patterns of Work**

The importance of the woods is a major theme threading through Berry's Sabbath collection, a theme that arises from Berry's practice of taking walks on the Sabbath in the woods close to his farm. On these walks, Berry intentionally confronts the limits of human beings in creation, learning to not "mistake himself as larger than he is" (VIII.7: "A Small Porch in the Woods," 2014) and learning to see "in it /the sanctity of all / creation in Heaven's sight" (XX, 2013).<sup>98</sup> This section examines the related theme of the Sabbath *of* the woods, the gracious life that the woods and all her creatures offer to humans as an example to imitate. In these poems, trees are beloved friends and companions, they sing and praise, and are fully adapted to their place, which forms a

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<sup>97</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 261. Usually when Berry slips into King James English, he is directing a prayer to the Lord. See, for example, X, 2002; XI, 2009; XI, 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 22.; Berry, *Sabbaths 2013*, 33.

space of grace and rest. The woods represent for Berry the providence and fertility of the created order – “the presence of the world being / made” (VIII.8: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014) – that offers the patterns human life is to harmonize with.<sup>99</sup>

One phrase that Berry uses in his poetry and non-fiction to describe this pattern is “the Genius of the Place,” which he takes from the writing of Alexander Pope (1688–1744). Pope encouraged gardeners and landscapers to “consult the Genius of the Place in all.” By “the Genius of the Place” Berry understands Pope to mean either “a guardian spirit or as the mostly invisible order or whole to which the place belongs to or both.”<sup>100</sup> I take Berry’s use of this term to refer more to the latter than the former. For example, in IV, 1990 Berry describes mowing a field and his choice to let the forest return to his land.

To speed the change of goods  
I spare the seedling trees,  
And thus invoke the woods,  
The genius of this place.<sup>101</sup>

Twenty years later, Berry writes in XI, 2011 the clearing of nearby virgin forests was

a fall from a kind of grace:  
from the forest in its long Sabbath,  
dependent only upon  
the Genius of this place, to the field  
dependent upon us, our work.<sup>102</sup>

In both of these poems the pattern of the forest is “the Genius of Place.” The “Genius” is the order of the woods in its wholeness and fertility. It is the characteristic harmony of creatures in their natural relations.

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<sup>99</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 23.

<sup>100</sup> Wendell Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983), 156.

<sup>101</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 102.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

Berry also refers to creation's pattern, order, or "Genius" as Nature's "in-forming beauty." As he writes in XIII, 2015, "The best of human work defers / always to the in-forming beauty / of Nature's work."<sup>103</sup> In VIII.8: "A Small Porch in the Woods," 2014 he refers to the pattern of the woods as "a fabric of interdependent wonders, / moment by moment completed in beauty."<sup>104</sup> Further on in VIII.17, 2014, Berry again observes that both the woods and pastures are "completed in beauty." For just as "love is the crisis of our work," here Berry writes,

Beauty is the crisis of our knowing,  
the signature of love indwelling  
in all created things, called from nothing  
by love, recognized and answered  
by love in the human heart, not reducible  
by any analysis to any fact.<sup>105</sup>

Beauty is the embodied sign and signature of God's love for creation. God, in love, called creation into being from nothing. Humans recognize and respond to this love by our own love.

Beauty is not superfluous but integral to the pattern and order of creation, integral to both its form and function. Berry bemoans the fact that there is "so much beauty" and a "surplus of perfection" in "the modest flowers of the woods," yet "so little love" (VII, 2012).<sup>106</sup> In natural creation, beauty is found everywhere, even in creatures on the verge of death. In I, 1987 Berry describes "a ragged half-dead wild plum / in bloom" that he came across on his Sabbath walk. Of this "old broken blooming tree" he writes,

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<sup>103</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 68.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>106</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 382.

I almost recognize as a friend  
the great impertinence of beauty  
that comes even to the dying,  
even to the fallen, without reason  
sweetening the air.<sup>107</sup>

God so loves the world that he bestows beauty “without reason” “even to the dying.” This is a “great impertinence” to a world that sees very little beauty worth preserving in living creatures, much less in the dying ones. Yet, even so, “in its time and its patience / beauty had come upon us” (IV, 1992).<sup>108</sup> Creation enfolds death and brokenness into its ever-evolving pattern and brings forth beauty.

This concept of “the Genius of Place” – regardless of whether the term used is pattern, order, “Genius,” or “in-forming beauty” – is important to Berry because he believes “one cannot act well or beneficently in a place until one has understood its nature, precedent to human intention.”<sup>109</sup> This is to consider the place without or before it was changed significantly by human interaction.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, “in country originally forested, the farmer must study the forest, because, to be healthy, the field must be an analogue of the forest; in analogy its nature is remembered. The nature of the original forest is, so to speak, “the Genius of the Place,” which one is obliged to consult.”<sup>111</sup> As a farmer in an area that was previously forest, Berry seeks out the regrown woods adjacent to his property for insight and inspiration. These are places that still bear the scars from

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>109</sup> Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *Standing by Words*, 159.

<sup>110</sup> Berry fully recognizes that there are few if any places that are truly free from historical human interaction. The importance of Berry’s insight does not depend upon experiencing a place as completely free from human intention, but more generally what a place does when humans do not interfere.

<sup>111</sup> Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *Standing by Words*, 159.

the first settlers of Kentucky but have begun their patterns of healing through human neglect.

And yet, human arts, labor, and economy are not identical to patterns of creation. As Berry cautions us in XIII, 2015, although “the best of human work defers / always to the in-forming beauty / of Nature’s work,” human work is still human and in that sense an artificial and ever fallible harmony.

...But human work,  
true to the nature of places  
as it should be, is not natural and  
and is not a mirror held up  
to nature. At best it is  
the gift of the Heavenly Muse  
to the farm’s art or the poet’s,  
by endless learning learned,  
forever incomplete.<sup>112</sup>

Human work informed by the beauty of “the Genius of the Place” is not a mirror or replica, but an improvisation on creation’s patterns. Harmony, to use the metaphor discussed above, is not possible with only a single note. Harmony relies on difference, but sympathy in difference. Human work that is “true to the nature of places” is a gift of God, “the Heavenly Muse,” who offers the possibility of working in sympathy with creation.

The Sabbath of the woods is creation making its life, establishing its order, without humans. The woods are where Berry finds both his own Sabbath rest and inspiration for his work on the farm. As Berry writes in section eight of VIII: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014,

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<sup>112</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 68.

The pattern for keeping this place  
we must take from the woods, if  
the land is to thrive in our using.  
If we were not here, Nature  
Would give this land to trees,  
Perennial, diverse, conserving  
Of land and water...<sup>113</sup>

The pattern of a healthy farm should harmonize with, in its own particular way, the pattern of the woods. He remarks elsewhere that “nature is / The best farmer” (IX: “The Farm,” 1991).<sup>114</sup> Just as the woods host a diversity of perennial plants, so too should the farm. The soil of the woods, enriched by the death of many creatures, is able to both hold water and let it drain. So to should the soil of the farm. Nothing within the forest is wasted, all creatures are included, and even that which is broken or disordered is contained within a larger life-giving order. In the forest, “the pattern of its breaking / involves also, given time, / the pattern of its healing” (VII, 2009).<sup>115</sup> Berry goes on in section twelve of “A Small Porch in the Woods” to consider the theme of form and disorder. He writes,

... The effects  
of hard weather, disease, human carelessness,  
even these are caught up like dropped stitches,  
gathered into the whole fabric, carried from  
what was to what is to what will be. This is  
the forest native to this place, its form  
ever completed, never finished, grace beyond  
all human comprehending...<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>114</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 120.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>116</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 28.

The forest is an “ever-forming form,” “ever completed” and yet “never finished.”<sup>117</sup> The wholeness of the forest is not static, but ever changing, ever renewing. Similarly, in V, 1985, Berry rhetorically asks the reader, “How long does it take to make the woods?”<sup>118</sup> The answer, of course, is “As long as it takes to make the world.”<sup>119</sup> Forests are always being made, changing, and evolving, moving from one form of wholeness to another, reconnecting relations that are broken and re-broken.

Elements of brokenness are, “like dropped stitches,” reincorporated into the overarching order and, as such, shift the overall form of wholeness.<sup>120</sup> Patterns of healing incorporate and transform patterns of brokenness, “provided” – and this caveat is crucial for Berry – “the scale is right,” that is, if the damage is not too severe (VIII.9: “A Small Porch in the Woods, 2014).<sup>121</sup> As Berry explains,

And our competence to do no  
permanent wrong to the land  
is limited by the land’s competence  
to suffer our ignorance, our errors  
...to recover, to be made whole.<sup>122</sup>

Creation’s ability to renew and remake its wholeness is not limitless. And creation’s ability for renewal becomes a limit for the scale of human work and ambitions, keeping the margins of error in our work as large as possible, so we “do no / permanent wrong to the land.” Moreover, the healing of creation is a non-competitive creative activity of Creator

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 29, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 28.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

and creation together. As Berry indicates in II, 1985, “When what was made has been unmade / The Maker comes to His work.”<sup>123</sup>

### **6.3.5 Belonging To Place: Imagination, Virtue, and Local Adaption**

Here, in this final section, we return to the first theme of chapter 5, Berry’s intentional vocation as a placed poet. As a person with a fully integrated imagination, Berry endeavors that all his work – his farm, his marriage, his household economy, his leisure, his poetry, etc. – be locally adapted to his place. His whole life is determined the limits imposed by his backwater, marginal land. Much influenced by William Carlos Williams – as chapter 4 discussed – Berry has sought to write poetry that is locally adapted to his place in terms of subject, rhythm, and language. His poetry has sought to use the imagination to honor, know, and clarify his place’s relationship to heaven, what Williams called “the eternal moment.”

In the previous chapter, we opened our examination of Berry’s Sabbath poetry by considering his vocation as a placed poet. In I, 2013, the preface of the *This Day* collection, Berry identifies himself as

...a poet of the river lands,  
a lowdown man of the deepest  
depth of the valley, where gravity gathers  
the waters, the poisons, the trash,  
where light comes late and leaves early.<sup>124</sup>

Like his farm, Berry “is a tree of a sort,” living his life within the limits of this marginal river land.<sup>125</sup> Like a tree that is formed by its situation, Berry has sought locally adapted methods and practices of farming. This commitment is reflected throughout the Sabbath

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<sup>123</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 64.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

collection. For example, VI, 2011 treats Berry's ongoing work to breed sheep that are well adapted to his hillside farm. He writes how

his flock has improved, somewhat by  
his choosing, no doubt, but more  
as the farm itself has chosen them  
for their thriving in it, on its  
terms, and so they are its own.  
They belong by adapting to the place  
as the shepherd wishes to belong.<sup>126</sup>

Berry's steeply hilled farmland will not support larger farm animals like cows, so from the very beginning he and his wife Tanya chose to raise sheep. The breed of sheep they chose was from Scotland and already adapted to hilly conditions. In the decades that have followed, Berry and the land itself have conspired together to breed a flock of sheep that flourishes on his particular piece of land. This is but one example of how Berry has worked to harmonize his farm work to his land, so that like his poetry and his sheep, it "belong[s] by adapting to the place."

#### 6.3.5.1 *Virtues Necessary to Belong to One's Place*

Both Berry's poetry and non-fiction witness to the central hope he has for the human engagement with our ruined, eroded, polluted, and yet still holy creation: that humans learn to *belong* to their places, to become members of their places. He writes in VI, 2007,

... Hope  
then to belong to your place by your own knowledge  
of what it is that no other place is, and by  
your caring for it as you care for no other place, this  
place that you belong to though it is not yours,  
for it was from the beginning and will be to the end.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

Each place on earth is different from every other – different ecologies, topographies, economies, and cultures. Correspondingly, patterns of wholeness, “the Genius of the place,” are particular to each place. Even so, the vision he has for human engagement with creation is the same for every place: humans attending to the particulars of their places, learning to care for these particulars, and imagining their places as gifts from God to which they belong as members, not owners. As XI, 2011 describes, we are to ask ourselves how “we might belong to it, / what we might use of it / for ourselves, leaving it whole.”<sup>128</sup>

This vision of belonging to creation’s wholeness is rooted in Berry’s vision of Sabbath and lived out through Sabbath-worthy work. One’s hope of life and heaven is founded “on the ground underfoot” (VI, 2007).<sup>129</sup> In VI, 2007, Berry links “the light of imagination” with sympathy and care for other people in other places. By “the light of imagination” you are able to perceive

the likeness of people in other places to yourself  
in your place. It lights invariably the need for care  
toward other people, other creatures, in other places  
as you would ask them to care toward your place and you.<sup>130</sup>

Cultivating a locally adapted imagination by observing limits, harmony, and love helps one to turn those sympathies and habits outward to the other. Berry’s vision of belonging to place through Sabbath-worthy work and Sabbath-inspired economic practices highlights the insight stated in the conclusion of VI, 2007:

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

No place at last is better than the world. The world  
is no better than its places. Its places at last  
are no better than their people while their people  
continue in them...<sup>131</sup>

All of the millions of places in creation need to be loved and cared for by the millions of people in those places, because these millions of places form the wholeness of God's holy creation. This vision encourages and requires personal accountability combined with moral integrity. The care of and thanksgiving for God's gift of creation begins at home. It begins with the imperfect places in which we currently reside.

In Berry's most recent collection of Sabbath poems, the title poem VIII: "A Small Porch in the Woods," 2014 is an extended 24-part reflection on a quotation from Alan of Lille's (ca. 1116–1202 or 1203) work *The Complaint of Nature*.<sup>132</sup> From the perspective of his small porch in the woods, Berry considers, among other themes, his land, the original settlement of Kentucky, economy, the forest, birds, flowers, and – most importantly for this section – the virtues necessary to keep the knowledge of creation's gifts fresh in one's memory and, so, to belong to one's place. This porch provides for Berry the visual and imaginative perspective to consider "the local geography / as a guide for thinking" (VIII.20, 2014).<sup>133</sup>

Five virtues that come into play throughout this poem are right-mindedness, forbearance, rightness of scale, love, and sympathy. Because we have already discussed

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> The following quotation serves as the epigraph of the poem: "*Why do you force the knowledge of me to leave your memory and go abroad, you in whom my gifts proclaim me who have blessed you with the right bounteous gifts of so many favors.... I am Nature who, by the gift of my condensation, have made you a sharer in my presence here and have deigned to bless you with my conversation*" (Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 12; emphasis in original).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 20.

the importance of love, this chapter will conclude with a brief exploration of the virtues of right-mindedness, forbearance, rightness of scale, and sympathy. These virtues are central for Berry's vision of humans truly belonging to their places.

Berry opens this poem with a definition of right-mindedness. He writes, "Right-mindedness: a mind in place, / in right relation to Nature and / its neighbors."<sup>134</sup> A person who is in their right mind has a mind adapted to their place and it in a healthy relationship with their place's membership. The way to a "right mind" is attention to "the living / geography, topography, ecology, history" of one's place.<sup>135</sup> This local "creaturely household" constitutes the "intimate reference" of one's life and the "unshifting star" to orient one's work.<sup>136</sup>

In section twenty-two, Berry connects rightness of mind with memory, affection, kindness and care. He writes,

When the ground is safely kept,  
when the scale is right, and when  
the resident human *mind*  
*is righted* by memory, affection,  
neighborly kindness and care,  
the giving of hands to work,  
all lives of woodland and pasture  
live by the economy of gifts,  
the only economy that will last.<sup>137</sup>

In order to follow the guide of place, a person with a right mind knows "the right use of gifts" of creation (VIII.22, 2014).<sup>138</sup> Berry goes on to explain that a "right use of gifts" is not to ask for more than is given and to give back more than one takes. Such use follows

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. Emphasis added.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

“the law of Nature” who is the “maker / and giver of the native patterns.”<sup>139</sup> A mind that has affection and love for a place, a mind that remembers the history of grace and brokenness of a place, a mind that responds in kindness and care to a place, is a mind at “home / in the place and the life you were given” (VIII.23, 2014).<sup>140</sup>

For Berry, the second and third virtues – of forbearance and rightness of scale – are linked through their association with the need for limits. Limits are necessary when caring for a place because, as section nine states, “to care for what we know requires / care for what we don’t.”<sup>141</sup> In order to care for the various unknown creatures and relations in the complex network of the Great Economy, we must cultivate virtues that attend to limits. Forbearance and rightness of scale are two such virtues.

Section nine continues, “Forbearance is the first care we give / to what we do not know.”<sup>142</sup> Forbearance connotes the qualities of patience, restraint, moderation, and mercy. Since “we live / by lives we don’t intend, lives / that exceed our thoughts and needs,” and in ignorance potentially destroy or undervalue our places, practices of moderation and restraint limit the damage humans can perpetuate at any given time (VIII.5).<sup>143</sup> In this way, forbearance is a practice of mercy toward those members and connections we cannot know or perceive.

Rightness of scale, the second virtue Berry mentions in section nine of “A Small Porch,” even more explicitly relates to the issue of limits. Berry describes rightness of scale

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

as “the willingness to think and work / within the limits of our *competence*.”<sup>144</sup> Rightness of scale in relation both to the limits imposed by the land itself and the limits imposed by human ignorance. The latter is what Berry treats here in section nine of this poem. By keeping the scale of practices of work and economy within the scale of our knowledge (which Berry believes is quite small in the grand scheme of things), humans have a better chance of doing “no permanent wrong to anything / of permanent worth to the earth’s life.”<sup>145</sup> As we discussed in chapter 4, ignorance, for Berry, is not an issue of information – we just haven’t learned enough, *yet* – but a problem of “form.” As limited and sinful creatures, we will never know enough to make the right decision. Thus, by attending to the limits imposed by human ignorance, “the world / in its mystery, the known unknown world, / will live and thrive while we live.”

A fourth virtue addressed in VIII: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014 is that of sympathy. Berry writes in section ten,

...Loving the forest,  
you enter it to walk and watch.  
As you observe its manifold and comely life,  
It enters familiarly into imagination,  
And so into sympathy. By sympathy  
The mind in the forest is made at home.<sup>146</sup>

And with this virtue, these three chapters on Wendell Berry have come full circle. As in chapter 4, Berry seeks a sympathetic, disciplined, and locally adapted imagination in order to be at home in the membership of a place. The practices of walking and observation – not coincidentally his own Sabbath practice – integrate the place within one’s

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 26.

imagination, such that it becomes a sympathetic imagination. Through sympathy – which also connotes compassion, kindness, and understanding – “the mind in the forest is made at home” “within the ever-forming form” of the forest.<sup>147</sup>

The virtues of right-mindedness, rightness of scale, forbearance, sympathy, and love enable human beings to become members of their place, locally adapted workers whose practices attend to the flourishing of human and non-human creatures. Berry framed VIII: “A Small Porch in the Woods,” 2014 as a reflection on Alan of Lille’s work *The Complaint of Nature*. A portion of the epigraph for this poem comes from that work: “*I am Nature who, by the gift of my condescension, have made you a sharer in my presence here and have deigned to bless you with my conversation.*”<sup>148</sup> These virtues are one way to “converse” with Nature and share in her presence, respecting the gift and therefore the giver – ultimately, the Creator. Berry’s intentional practice of keeping Sabbath and writing Sabbath poetry allows him to imagine a way of working and of structuring economies that are in sympathy with a local place. Berry’s Sabbath vision is rooted in imagining “the local geography / as a guide for thinking” (VIII.20, 2014),<sup>149</sup> and – following thinking – a guide for working and making. His vision embraces, organizes, and relates rest and work, person and land, Heaven and Earth.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Part II of this dissertation has argued that the integrative imagination of Wendell Berry, as embodied by his Sabbath poetry and poetic practice, can be employed to meet the deficiencies of Gunton’s vision, providing powerful exemplifications of Gunton’s

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 26, 29.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 12. Emphasis in original.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 20.

major concerns. Berry uses locally adapted poetry as an ethical practice that enables the formation of a sympathetic and placed imagination, such that humans can perceive ways to work in harmony with the material creation.

Together chapters 5 and 6 have argued that Berry's Sabbath vision is an integrated and integrating vision of wholeness, one that intentionally imagines the holiness of place in relation to God and, therefore, seeks the health of the place and its membership through Sabbath-worthy work. In chapter 5, we explored the "rest" side of his vision, his calling for humans to attend to and learn to imagine the wholeness, life, and sanctity of the membership of the woods. In this chapter, we explored the second answer to the question, "How may a human come to rest?"<sup>150</sup> The answer to this question was Sabbath-worthy work and economy, a vision of human culture-making oriented to the possibility of rest for both humans and creatures.

Through engagement with the same four themes as the previous chapter we have shown that Berry's vision of Sabbath rest orients his vision of human engagement with the created order, calling for Sabbath-worthy work and economy. First, after learning to hear the song of creation one is called to participate in its healing and renewal. Good work is Sabbath-worthy work, work that is sympathetic to the life of the created order and recognizes its limits. It is work that attempts to harmonize with creation's patterns, working with these patterns of fertility and not against them. Second, after learning to imagine earth as the threshold of heaven and entrance into the eternal moment, one is called to understand this as a gift from God. All human work should seek to honor that gift, embodying gratitude, affection, and love. Third, after learning to confront one's limit

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<sup>150</sup> Wendell Berry, *Leavings: Poems*, 29.

through the Sabbath in the woods, in the posture of humility one embraces working according to the “Genius of the Place,” its informing beauty and order. Fourth, after committing to one’s place, one seeks to cultivate virtues that allow one to belong to one’s place as well. These are virtues that all one to attend to the particularities of place through the process of local adaption. Berry mentions, among others, right-mindedness, forbearance, rightness of scale, sympathy, and love.

In working to imagine, remember, re-member, and give honor to his “backwater” place, Berry consistently imagines his woods and his farm in “the sanctity of all / creation in Heaven’s sight.” This explicit link between Sabbath imagination, the practice of poetry and limits, and human engagement with the created world give witness to Berry’s integrated imagination that can include art and politics, work and leisure, culture and ecology. This is the kind of comprehensive vision that Gunton was seeking for his “sacrifice of praise.” To close this dissertation’s consideration of the human vocation in creation via Colin Gunton’s pneumatological vision of creation’s perfecting and Wendell Berry’s Sabbath vision of human rest and work, the conclusion will explicitly draw these two thinkers together in order to show their points of resonance and generative potential for clearer understanding of how culture-making can offer a sacrifice of praise.

## Conclusion

### Praise and Poetry: A Sabbath Imagination Enriches Humanity's "Sacrifice of Praise"

*Through [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.*

*Hebrews 13:15*

*If imagination is to have real worth to us, it needs to have a practical, an economic, effect. It needs to establish us in our places with a practical respect for what is there besides ourselves. I think the highest earthly result of imagination is probably local adaptation.<sup>1</sup>*

*Wendell Berry*

*This is the Sabbath, the place, the rest, from which we go to work. From here the economies and politics of husbandry are quietly attested in the heart.<sup>2</sup>*

*Wendell Berry*

#### 7.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, we found that Gunton's vision for a unified human culture – one that integrates embodied versions of truth, goodness, and beauty – had the potential to suggest concrete practices of particularization, specifically art making, that enact Gunton's vision for human culture as offering a sacrifice of praise. In order to fully imagine Gunton's vision of human culture-making as offering a sacrifice of praise,

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, "American Imagination and the Civil War," in *Imagination in Place* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 34. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry, "VIII.19: "A Small Porch in the Woods," 2014," *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2016), 36.

however, a particular example of such a life and artistic practice was needed. Part II of this dissertation turned to the Sabbath poetry and poetic practice of Wendell Berry to find this concrete and particularizing example. In this final chapter, we will clarify the ways in which Berry's life and work serves as an *example* of Gunton's vision for an integrative human culture and the ways in which Berry's Sabbath imagination *expands* on Gunton's vision of offering a sacrifice of praise by incorporating the cultural sphere of work and economy.

## **7.2 Wendell Berry's Poetic Sabbath Practice as a Concrete and Particular *Example* of Colin Gunton's Desire for a Fully Integrated Cultural Engagement**

### ***7.2.1 Berry & the True: Imagining Creation's Wholeness and Holiness***

#### *7.2.1.1 Gunton on The True*

Chapter 3 described Gunton's attempt at offering an account of truth and knowledge that is not bound by a typical Enlightenment view of "objective" knowledge, but necessarily involves tacit and embodied engagement. Drawing on the work of Michael Polanyi, Gunton argues that knowledge is relational in structure and materially embodied. A form of material particularity is at the very foundation of our knowledge. Engaging with this particularity entails tacit awareness through physically indwelling the world. Indwelling draws on the faculty of the imagination to help us mediate and understand what we are experiencing. In concert with tacit knowledge, metaphor allows humans to intentionally, yet indirectly, engage with reality. Metaphor achieves this by juxtaposing concepts that illumine one another yet remain distinct. It is a tool for both scientific discovery and artistic creation and enables language to accommodate to the

order and structure of the world. This accommodation results in an indirect harmony between our language and our world, a harmony that can serve to reorder and recreate our relation to the world we inhabit.

7.2.1.2 *Berry and Embodied Knowing, Imagination, and Metaphor*

Berry's Sabbath poetry offers an example of the kind of particular, embodied imagination that Gunton seeks. First, Berry's Sabbath poetry is rooted in his practice of walking in the woods, an intentional engagement of the world and its material particularities. In a way similar to Gunton and Polanyi, Berry's knowledge of his place "derive[s] from the concrete relation in which [he] exists with reference to whom and what he knows."<sup>3</sup> It is a process of coming-to-know that Berry has continued for nearly 40 years. Although Berry's poetry is not equivalent to the tacit knowledge of Polanyi's blind man with his stick – Berry's poetic process is not tacit knowledge, though Berry may have assimilated some poems so deeply that they become for him tacit knowledge – it would be fair to say that Berry's practice of walking and its associative poetic practice, together, serve as an extension of himself. Together, these practices are one way through which he seeks to indwell his local place and to perceive his place in the local membership more clearly. Through the practice of writing of Sabbath poetry, Berry's locally adapted imagination mediates between his tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, helping to put into words the impressions, insights, and connections he witnesses on his walks.

Second, Berry's Sabbath imagination brings him closer to the creaturely particularities he seeks to know. That is, it avoids mere "fancy." As we saw in chapter 4,

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<sup>3</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Knowledge and Culture: Towards an Epistemology of the Concrete," in *Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hugh Montefiore (London: Mowbray, 1992), 99.

Berry's imaginative vision of the world perceives and cultivates the wholeness, holiness, and health of the created order. Through the imagination he attempts to glimpse the world as God sees it – in its wholeness and holiness. Recall that imagination, for Berry, is a faculty of perception. He writes, “To imagine is to see most clearly, familiarly, and understandingly with the eyes, but also to see inwardly, with ‘the mind’s eye.’ It is to see actively, with the force of vision and even with visionary force.”<sup>4</sup> It is to think together both the visible patterns of creation and its sanctity in the eyes of God and before the threshold of heaven.

The created order, which Berry calls the Great Economy, is a fundamentally relational structure: a complex network of mutual dependence, interdependence, and influence connecting all creatures. For Berry, the failure to imagine human life within these complex dependencies and relations that characterize the Great Economy constitutes a failure to imagine and perceive the creation as holy. Hence, Berry's poetic Sabbath imagination highlights connections between human culture-making – patterns of art making, farming, and working – and the health and wholeness of the material creation. The human imagination enables humans to experience the world as real and therefore imagine what might really be accomplished in relation to the limits of a specific place.

Third, Berry employs various poetic metaphors to come to know his place, and through knowing his place, harmonize his words and his work with the patterns of wholeness exhibited in his place. Poetry and metaphor are tools for local adaption, or, to

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<sup>4</sup> Berry, “It All Turns on Affection,” in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 14.

use Gunton’s language, for accommodating our “language to the causal structure of the world.”<sup>5</sup> Some of the metaphors discussed in chapters 5 and 6 include: “threshold of heaven,” “eternal moment,” “song of creation,” “genius of place,” “a battered wife,” “harmony,” and “rhyme.” The first two – “threshold of heaven” and “eternal moment” – are particularly appropriate for representing Gunton’s vision of wholeness and holiness. To envision a place in its wholeness is to see “in it / the sanctity of all / creation in Heaven’s sight” (XX, 2013).<sup>6</sup> The consequence of this vision is to ask oneself, “What shall be the art / By which this sight can live?” (I, 2004).<sup>7</sup> Berry’s metaphors point toward a harmony of words and work, of poetry and farming, of humans and other members of the created order.

## ***7.2.2 Berry and the Good: Cultivating a Sympathetic and Locally Adapted Imagination***

### *7.2.2.1 Gunton on The Good*

Recall that Gunton associates the Good variously with ethics, morals, or action. It is, to quote Gunton, “a whole way of being in the world.”<sup>8</sup> Since the human vocation in creation is to offer a sacrifice of praise with and on behalf of the material creation and, in doing so, participate in the “proper perfecting of created things,” it necessarily requires a

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<sup>5</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Wendell Berry, *Sabbaths 2013* (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 2015), 33.

<sup>7</sup> Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 250.

<sup>8</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 13.

correlative ethic.<sup>9</sup> Actions of “proper perfecting” enable the created order to be and become itself, a vocation requiring what Gunton calls an “ethic of createdness.” Although Gunton describes it only briefly, an ethic of createdness includes 1) an environmental or ecological ethic concerned with the effects of human culture on the created world; 2) an ethic of priesthood, for which the governing image is that of the Christian sacraments – material elements transformed by human hands and offered freely back to God in praise; and 3) a clear view of creation’s (and our own!) temporality and mortality, forcing humans to recognize that all human actions and culture are forged in the context of death and teleological perfection. Although rough, this outline provides a sense of what kind of ethic Gunton seeks to accompany his vision for the human calling in creation as a sacrifice of praise worked out through various forms of culture and art.

#### 7.2.2.2 *Berry’s Sympathetic and Locally Adapted Imagination*

Berry’s conception of the ends and goals of poetry as cultivating a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination offers a concrete example of how Gunton’s “ethic of createdness” might be put into practice and suggests that the “proper perfecting” of creation and offering a “sacrifice of praise” can be found in the process of local adaptation. First, Berry’s poetic vision is of an ecological ethic that is concerned with how humans engage the created order through locally adapted practices of poetry and farming. His vision of creation’s wholeness and holiness affirms that there can be no human wholeness or health without the corresponding health and wholeness of the created order. This is why Berry believes that centering environmental concerns does not ignore human

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<sup>9</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

concerns or the role humans are to play in participating in the healing of the created world. This focus on ecological issues does not, as Gunton fears, abstract the material creation from concerns for human engagement and flourishing, but more fully recognizes the material world's own patterns of flourishing. This vision also does not displace God's work in creation, because imagining the holiness of one's place is part of the process of becoming locally adapted. Berry's practice of Sabbath poetry aims, following William Carlos Williams, to use the imagination to think together the "eternal moment" and holiness of the Sabbath with the actual ground underfoot.

Berry's focus on ecological concerns also reframes Gunton's claim that there will always be an ecological crisis, a claim which seems to confuse change and destruction. Berry agrees that humans cannot engage creation without changing it. This is why, therefore, his goal of harmony – as embodied in Sabbath-worthy work and economy – is so critical to his Sabbath vision. As chapter 6 showed, Berry's vision of Sabbath-worthy work involves a human engagement with creation where "change is made / without violence to the ground" (VI, 1982)<sup>10</sup> and where humans find ways "for love to reach the ground" (IX: "The Farm," 1991).<sup>11</sup> This construal of harmony does not guarantee that human actions will be free of problematic consequences, but recognizes that any discussion of "human responsibility" or "dominion," to use Gunton's terms, must come after closely observing, attending to, and understanding a local place. There is no dominion or responsibility in the abstract that can be applied to the whole created order, only particular human actions that are applied to a specific place with specific limits in

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<sup>10</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

relation to a specific community. Humans cannot hope to support creaturely particularity without recognizing creaturely patterns of wholeness and health.

This brings us to Gunton's second characteristic of an ethic of createdness, the image of the eucharist as a guiding paradigm for human engagement with material creation. Berry, like Gunton, rejects any notion of salvation that is out of the created world instead of within it – for Berry earth is the very threshold of heaven – and assumes that the chief goal of human engagement with the created order is honoring the Creator. While Berry's guiding paradigm for human engagement is membership, both the image of eucharist and the metaphor of membership seek human patterns of culture-making that enable creatures to praise their Creator. Berry's Sabbath poetry seeks to help one learn "the maker's joy in which is made / the joy in which we come to rest" (XII, 2007)<sup>12</sup> and learn

...work that honors [God's] work,  
the true economies of goods and words,  
to make my arts compatible  
with the songs of the local birds (X, 2002).<sup>13</sup>

Humans delight in the Sabbath holiness when we attend to our work in such a way as to heal the song of creation through Sabbath-worthy work that harmonizes with the patterns and wholeness of creation – a theme we will develop further below. Healing this song, this wholeness, is a concrete way to enable the praise of the created order.

Third, in relation to Gunton's concern for temporality and mortality, Berry's practices of keeping Sabbath and writing Sabbath poetry are rooted in a sober recognition of human limits. To become locally adapted is to be able to perceive and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 235.

imagine not only the limits of time and death, but also human limits of knowledge, skill, and imagination, and ecological limits on carrying capacity, fertility, etc. – the limits at which a local place’s patterns of wholeness begin to fracture and break down. Human and ecological limits of place encourage what Berry calls an “elaboration of elegance.”<sup>14</sup> This engagement recognizes the limits of a place and stands in harmony with the goodness and ultimate perfection of creation. Human ignorance calls, at minimum, for the cultivation of virtues: reverence, humility, love, self-restraint, forbearance, and sympathy.

### ***7.2.3 Berry & the Beautiful: Poetry as a Practice of Attending to and Imagining Particulars***

#### *7.2.3.1 Gunton on The Beautiful*

Aesthetics, for Gunton, as we saw in chapter 3, is concerned with offering an account of the materiality of beauty, which is best represented by human artistic activity. Gunton understands works of the arts to be cultural objects that embody and reorder creaturely particularity. The arts are particularizing practices that acknowledge the goodness and beauty of the *material* creation, specifically. He is not especially concerned with how the material creation leads to or reflects immaterial beauty. Rejecting the Platonic tradition’s stress on the transience or formlessness of matter, Gunton affirms the orderliness of creation even where this order has been broken or twisted. Works of the arts renew creation’s order and create new order, which, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, may offer a sacrifice of praise in anticipation of the perfected creation. Art and aesthetics are, like reason and science, vehicles of meaning, though theoretically

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<sup>14</sup> Wendell Berry, “Standing by Words,” in *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983), 51.

elusive. Through works of the arts, the material creation's voice is renewed and witnesses to its beauty, goodness, and future perfection. Art making is an imaginative practice that draws on embodied and tacit ways of knowing and potentially embodies a way of being in the world consistent with the human vocation to offer a sacrifice of praise.

### 7.2.3.2 *Berry and Poetry as a Practice Particularization and Attention*

Like Gunton, Berry is concerned with the goodness and materiality of the present, created order. As we explored in chapter 5, it is not that Berry denies the eschatological *telos* of creation, but he rejects the impulse of some Christians to view salvation as salvation *from* the world and thus ignore the health of material creation. As Berry insists in VII, 2008: "Look down, look down, and save your soul / by honester dirt."<sup>15</sup> And also in "The Wild Geese":

And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. *What we need is here.*<sup>16</sup>

What humans need for flourishing – fertile land, community, beauty, creaturely companionship, the presence of God, etc. – can be found here, in all our particular places, if we train our imaginations to see.

In Berry's life, the art and craft of poetry is critical for cultivating both a sympathetic and locally adapted imagination, and for supporting work that heals creation's wholeness. His poetic practice of walking through the woods on the Sabbath and being inspired to write Sabbath poetry enables Berry to imagine his place more

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<sup>15</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 321.

<sup>16</sup> Berry, *New Collected Poems*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 180. Emphasis added.

clearly and more faithfully. Poetry – as a practice of attention, limit, and particularization – aids Berry in doing justice to his subject, that is, in representing his subject truthfully and in suggesting human work that is life-giving and liberating for the created order.

Poetry is also the practice of making a new creature, one with its own integrity and wholeness and one that harmonizes with and potentially participates in the healing of creation's order. As chapter 4 showed, Berry, following Williams, understands art, and therefore the craft of poetry as “an imitation of the *processes* or creativity of nature.”<sup>17</sup> Poetry is about catching the rhythm and hearing the song of creation in one's local place, then developing language that is appropriately adapted to that place, respecting and honoring its sources. The craft of poetry relies on the completing assistance of the imagination to attempt to overcome the fractures and broken connections in a given place and to re-place or re-position persons imaginatively in relation to these patterns such that they are able to imagine and enact practices of healing. This is a re-ordering of what is given-to-hand aimed at wholeness, a point that resonates deeply with Gunton's understanding of created perfection.

Unlike Gunton, Berry does not explicitly state or develop a theory of aesthetics or beauty. He does, however, refer to creation's patterns of wholeness as Nature's “in-forming beauty.” As he writes in XIII, 2015, “The best of human work defers / always to the in-forming beauty / of Nature's work.”<sup>18</sup> Berry finds beauty even in death, as in the

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<sup>17</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011), 154. Emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Berry, *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 68.

example of the “ragged half-dead wild plum / in bloom” (I, 1987).<sup>19</sup> The patterns of wholeness – which include the cycle of death and birth, the pattern of the soil’s fertility – within the created order are themselves beautiful. They are often “elaborations of elegance,” patterns of health and flourishing that have enriched themselves within defined limits and therefore offer key examples for the poet-farmer who submits himself to the limits of place. Created beauty is rooted in relational connections with other creatures and depends on the health of these connections.

As critical as poetry is for Berry, it is but one practice within a whole association of practices that involve limits, fidelity, affection, memory, attention, and particularization. Recall that for Berry, the poet serves the poetry with his or her whole life, not just with talents or ideas. And the resultant poetry is intended, subsequently, to serve one’s life and one’s local membership.<sup>20</sup> To write poetry is to discover, understand, celebrate, and remember – as well as *re*-member – the order of creation and to live in harmony with that order through other practices of work and economy. The craft of poetry – as a formal, memorable, and musical medium – does aim for beauty in words, images, and phrases, but also is concerned with cultivating practices of attention and particularization that embody wholeness. To use Gunton’s words, Berry’s poetry orders and re-orders creation in ways that give voice and fresh expression to the material world, perhaps anticipating their eschatological healing. This exemplifies what Gunton desires, a fully integrative human life, one that brings together concerns for truth, goodness, and beauty through the particularizing art of poetry.

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<sup>19</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Recall how Berry claims to be a poet-farmer or farmer-poet and is unable to separate the two. His art, life, and work are intertwined and mutually supporting.

### **7.3 Wendell Berry's Sabbath Vision as an *Expansion* of Colin Gunton's Vision of the Human Vocation vis-à-vis Creation, that is, a "Sacrifice of Praise"**

Gunton's conception of "sacrifice of praise" is both intriguingly suggestive and frustratingly vague. And as a criterion for judging the quality of human work and engagement with the created order, it lacks defined standards and goals. Gunton's use of the Christian sacraments, particularly the eucharist, as a paradigmatic example of a sacrifice of praise – human work transforming material creation for the praise and glory of God – does not extend itself easily.<sup>21</sup> In this final section of the conclusion, we show how Berry's Sabbath vision extends Gunton's vision by suggesting standards for what life as a sacrifice of praise might look like in practice.

#### **7.3.1 *Gunton and Modernity's Displacement of God***

According to Gunton, modernity's disengagement from the God of Christendom and its displacement of this God from the center of meaning and unity of being has resulted in our current cultural condition of alienation, fragmentation, and homogeneity.<sup>22</sup> His solution, in *The One, the Three and the Many*, is to reposition God, and especially the Spirit, to the center of the meaning and being of creation, a point I discussed in chapters 1 and 2. There we saw – through the themes of the mediation of

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<sup>21</sup> For example, much of the bread used in American churches is from the grocery store, made by machines, and often contains ingredients procured as the expense of other places and peoples, not to mention that many brands contain undisclosed levels of pesticides. The process of mass production does not exhibit what Gunton would desire for an offering of a "sacrifice of praise." This does not erase store-bought bread's sacramental potential, but it may disqualify it from being a paradigmatic example of how humans should faithfully engage and transform the created order.

<sup>22</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, 16, 28.

perfection, relationality, and particularization – how Gunton characterizes the mission of the Holy Spirit as eschatologically perfecting the created order and, in so doing, enabling anticipations of perfection in the present age. The human calling to engage the created order, and through this engagement to offer a sacrifice of praise, is understood in light of the Spirit’s perfecting. The Spirit enables human participation in the perfection of creation through human culture-making. This cultural sacrifice of praise involves the giving and receiving of freedom and particularity, cultivating relations that support the particularization of persons and creatures, and the “proper perfecting” of the created order.

Yet this vision, we found, was too abstract and inchoate to be directly applied to particular instances of human culture-making. What do care and responsibility consist of? How far do they extend? What does a culture oriented towards offering a sacrifice of praise look like? How is it evaluated? In light of these concerns, one key element that Berry brings to Gunton’s vision of human culture-making as a sacrifice of praise that participates in the Spirit’s perfection of creation is his vision of Sabbath rest, which necessarily implies standards for Sabbath economy and Sabbath-worthy work.

### ***7.3.2 Berry’s Vision of Sabbath-Worthy Work and Sabbath Economy***

Berry’s Sabbath vision, as embodied in his Sabbath poetry and practice, concretizes and particularizes Gunton’s desire to center God – for Berry’s poetry seeks to imagine his place as the threshold of heaven and as entrance into the eternal moment of the Sabbath – but also connects this vision of creation’s wholeness and holiness with a vision of human work and economy that honors its holiness and heals its wholeness.

Berry’s link between Sabbath rest and Sabbath-worthy work and economy is crucial to

furthering Gunton's project because the disengagement from and displacement of God has caused not only alienation, fragmentation, and homogeneity, but also the formation and development of a capitalist economy – the consumer-industrial economy – that is without limit, without mercy, and without a commitment to the common flourishing of all human and non-human creation. As we explored in chapter 6, it is an economy founded on greed and the willingness to destroy every place in the name of efficiency and profit. Without acknowledging and resisting the all-encompassing and destructive nature of the consumer-industrial economy, our attempts to offer a sacrifice of praise may blindly accept its definitions of flourishing, relationality, and success.

Recall that economy is a central way Berry characterizes human cultural-making. All human economies – or, as Berry calls them, “little economies” – operate within and in dependence on the Great Economy. A little economy can either seek harmony with the pattern and order of the Great Economy, or reject the limits inherent in the Great Economy's pattern. Berry believes it is necessary for a little human economy to recognize that it cannot produce value *ex nihilo*. The value of all cultural products is rooted in the Great Economy, given by God for our use in a way that preserves God's pleasure in creation. Humans add or diminish value through the character and quality of the work performed. “In a good human economy,” he writes, “these transformations [from natural materials to cultural products] would be made by good work, which would be properly valued and the workers properly rewarded,” all the while acknowledging in humility that the materials worked did not originate with us.<sup>23</sup> Fundamentally for Berry, “good human

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<sup>23</sup> Wendell Berry, “Two Economies,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 224.

work honors God's work."<sup>24</sup> Though his vision is of little human economies that operate in sympathy with the Great Economy – “wheel within wheel” – such a vision is “our riddle / to which the answer is a life / that none of us has lived” (XII, 2008).<sup>25</sup> Few if any Americans have successfully lived out the answer to the consumer-industrial economy's destruction of American lands and lands across the world. A vision like Berry's is needed to inspire, cultivate virtues, and set standards for human work and economy.

In the context of Berry's Sabbath imagination, care of and responsibility for the wellbeing of the created order comes through Sabbath-worthy work and economy. As we explored in chapter 6 – through the various themes of Berry's Sabbath poetry – Sabbath-worthy work and economy does, at the very least, the following: it attends to the song of creation and discerns patterns of wholeness revealed in the created order, seeks harmony with the song by improvising within the limits of those patterns, embodies gratitude for God's gift of creation and is subsequently guided by affection for the created order, and cultivates virtues necessary to locally adapt to one's place and heal the song of creation. The end goal of Sabbath-worthy work and economy is for humans to engage the created order in such a way as to maintain its fertility and patterns of flourishing in the midst of and alongside human flourishing. Good human work becomes part of the matrix of healthy relations that characterize the wholeness of a place. This, for Berry, is where a life oriented towards offering a sacrifice of praise would begin.

Berry's poetic Sabbath vision of the ends and goals of Sabbath-worthy work and economy encourages practices of particularization all persons can participate in, poetic or

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<sup>24</sup> Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 312.

<sup>25</sup> Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems*, 327.

agricultural skill notwithstanding. First, Berry's vision of Sabbath-worthy work begins in rest and leads toward rest, all the while attending to the song of creation and discerning patterns of wholeness. Counterintuitive to many contemporary discussions surrounding ecological and societal issues, "work" begins in silence and stillness, in observation and attention. It begins by denying one's own desires and fantasies in order to begin to see a place for what it is. I contend that beginning in rest, and rejecting the consumer-industrial imagination will lead to a form of repentance. Berry's poetry never uses the word "repentance" to describe its Sabbath vision. Yet the goal of hearing the song of creation in silence and training one's imagination to perceive the particularities and patterns of wholeness encourages one to recognize all of the ways one's life and work – and the economic patterns one is enmeshed in and dependent upon – oppose the flourishing of these patterns. Before one can perform Sabbath-worthy work, one must recognize and resist patterns of engaging the created order that hinder the healing and flourishing of creation's wholeness. Then one must turn toward forms of working and engaging that lead to the goal of Sabbath rest.

Second, Berry's vision of Sabbath-worthy work seeks harmony with the song of creation by improvising within the limits of the patterns perceived through attention and rest. Envisioning practices of work and economy that fit in harmony with the patterns of creation requires, as we have seen, cultivating the imagination. Berry is clear that "if imagination is to have real worth to us it needs to have a practical, an economic, effect. It needs to establish us in our places with a practical respect for what is there besides

ourselves. I think the highest earthly result of imagination is probably local adaptation.”<sup>26</sup> The imagination is cultivated, on this account, not only for the purpose of writing poetry that is locally adapted to place but also for discovering ways of living, eating, and working that are locally adapted.<sup>27</sup> Local adaptation has an economic reality that expands beyond the woods or the farm – remember that Williams Carlos Williams lived in a suburb – and applies to those living in urban and suburban neighborhoods as well. Berry encourages persons to stop, commit, and begin where they find themselves. People do not need to become farmers to practice local adaptation. They can attend to various patterns embodied in the built environment and aim to work in such a way as to reknit patterns of wholeness in contradistinction to ecological, social, and economic patterns of brokenness, oppression, and exploitation. This requires that people meet and interact with others in their communities to learn about their lives and do research on their neighborhood or city. This construal of local adaptation is a form of reconciliation between humans and non-human creatures.

Third, Berry’s vision of Sabbath rest and Sabbath-worthy work suggests a constellation of virtues and dispositions necessary to support practices of human culture-making. Good work embodies gratitude for God’s gift of creation, is guided by affection for the created order, and cultivates virtues necessary to locally adapt to one’s place and heal the song of creation. Berry notes that love and affection for persons and places are emotions that the consumer-industrial economy necessarily rejects – it must be free to move on and disregard any place. But, as the title of his Jefferson Lecture, *It All Turns on*

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<sup>26</sup> Wendell Berry, “American Imagination and the Civil War,” in *Imagination in Place*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Though of course the former is intended to support the formation of the latter.

*Affection*, indicates, “for human beings, affection is the ultimate motive.”<sup>28</sup> This is because, unlike duty or obligation, “affection involves us entirely.”<sup>29</sup> Affection and love tie us to our places and guide our actions. In addition to love and affection, we have seen Berry’s Sabbath collection highlight various virtues and dispositions, including: attention, care, commitment, fidelity, forbearance, fortitude, gratitude, hope, humility, mercy, patience, pleasure, respect, restraint, reverence, right-mindedness, rightness of scale, and sympathy. This constellation of mutually reinforcing virtues and affections suggest standards of evaluation from which to judge and clarify practices and objects of human culture-making that seek to offer a sacrifice of praise.

Berry’s Sabbath vision, with its necessary correlates of Sabbath-worthy work and economy, expands on Gunton’s vision of the human vocation in creation by ensuring that any cultural offering of praise includes and considers the messy and concrete realities of human economy, work, art, agriculture, homemaking, and placemaking. Like Gunton, Berry’s vision attempts to overcome the alienation, fragmentation, and homogeneity that characterize contemporary culture and economy. Through practices of attention and particularization, healing and hallowing, loving and caring, humans may be able to participate in the Spirit’s renewal of the present created order, while pointing both backwards to its initial peace and goodness, as well as forward to its ultimate perfection.

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<sup>28</sup> Berry, “Economy and Pleasure,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, 212.

<sup>29</sup> Wendell Berry, “It All Turns on Affection,” in *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays*, 32–33.

## 7.4 Conclusion

This dissertation has paired Wendell Berry's Sabbath imagination with Colin Gunton's pneumatological vision of the human vocation in creation to offer a sacrifice of praise. Gunton's vision of human culture-making seeks to reposition the triune God to the center of being and meaning, showing how the Spirit's perfecting mission of the project of creation brings creatures back into saving relation with the Father through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Spirit's mediation also enables human participation in the project to perfect and particularize the created order through human culture-making, our sacrifice of praise. Although Gunton's vision is lacking in concrete examples of human culture-making that might characterize a sacrifice of praise, we turned to Berry's Sabbath vision, as embodied in his Sabbath poetry, to provide two key resources for Gunton's pneumatological vision: i) a concrete and particular *example* of human engagement with place and culture-making that exemplifies Gunton's desire for fully integrated cultural engagement of the True, Good, and Beautiful, and ii) an *expansion* of Gunton's vision of the human vocation vis-à-vis creation by incorporating the cultural sphere of work and economy. Berry's vision of Sabbath rest, peace, joy, and affection presents us with a goal toward which to orient our work and leisure, art and economy: it is "the Sabbath, the place, the rest, / from which we go to work."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wendell Berry, "VIII.19: "A Small Porch in the Woods," 2014," *A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014 and 2015 Together with the Presence of Nature in the Natural World*, 36.

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## **Biography**

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