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## Ecocriticism and Christian Literary Scholarship

Timothy J. Burberry

**Abstract:** *This essay presents a case for ecocriticism as a viable critical method for Christian scholars. It begins with an historical overview of the method, then examines common ground shared by ecocriticism and Christianity, including what amounts to a kind of critical realism, and the belief in the inherent goodness of creation. Two potential obstacles are then addressed by way of Lynn White, Jr.'s famous essay, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." These include the relationship of the Bible and the environment, and the charge of anthropocentrism. I believe White is partly right, but contend that neither objection is fatal for Christian scholars who wish to employ ecocriticism.*

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Since the 1970s *Christianity and Literature* has periodically featured articles that attempt to integrate Christianity and literary criticism. The latest installment, the Winter 2009 issue of *C&L*, published papers that were first delivered at a 2007 *C&L* colloquium entitled "A Seminar on Christian Scholarship and the Turn to Religion in Literary Studies." In these essays, scholars offer appraisals of Marxism, post-secularism, African-American studies, and queer theory, among others. Earlier issues of *C&L* feature discussions of neo-humanism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction, as well as several incisive articles focusing on literature and the environment.<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Scholar's Review* has also published essays that consider the relationship of Christianity and environmentalism.<sup>2</sup> And a number of scholarly monographs focusing on the intersection of Christianity, ecology, and literature have appeared in the past decade.<sup>3</sup> However, a sustained consideration of ecocriticism as a viable theory for Christian scholars has not yet been offered. Such is my aim here.

I shall argue that ecocriticism is, in general, quite compatible with

Christian premises. It offers an ethical mode of criticism that can appeal to our colleagues and students, and constitutes one of the most comprehensive of critical methods. As Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray point out, “Unlike other approaches to literary criticism, ecocriticism addresses the relationship between writers, texts, and the world from a truly global perspective—one in which ‘the world’ is the entire ecosphere, not just human society” (125). And it may be that Christian literary scholars can play a part in combating environmental problems, given our interest in the role of religion and narrative, for as eco-philosopher Max Oelschlaeger argues, “there are no solutions for the systemic causes of ecocrisis ... apart from religious narrative” (qtd. in Merritt, xiv).<sup>4</sup> In my conclusion, I shall offer several ways in which Christian scholarship can enrich ecocriticism.

### Ecocriticism: An Overview

While many *C&L* readers probably have a sense of the basic tenets of ecocriticism, a few brief remarks on its history and dominant concerns may be helpful. I begin by offering some, along with a disclaimer from Ursula Heise, one of the method’s most influential practitioners, who notes that the field is so complex, it deserves nothing short of a book-length introduction to do it justice. (She recommends Greg Garrard’s 2004 book *Ecocriticism* and Lawrence Buell’s 2005 study *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*.)<sup>5</sup>

Officially, ecocriticism has been a presence on the interpretive scene for about 20 years, yet it has important antecedents. Buell, for example, opens *The Future of Environmental Criticism* by noting an ancient one:

Creative art and critical reflection have always taken a keen interest in how the material world is engaged, absorbed, and reshaped by theory, imagination, and *techné*. [For instance], the opening chapters of Genesis ... have been blamed as the root cause of western technodominationism ... My point in mentioning this debate is not to arbitrate it but merely to call attention to the antiquity and durability of environmental discourse. (1)

Modern precursors of ecocriticism include Kenneth Burke’s 1937 study *Attitudes Toward History*, a work that leads Laurence Coupe to label Burke a “pioneer of ecocriticism,” and two classic studies of pastoralism, Leo Marx’s *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American Culture* (1964) and Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City* (1973).<sup>6</sup> The term “ecocriticism” was coined by William Rueckert in a 1978 essay,

yet the phrase did not see wider usage until it was appropriated in 1989 by the Western Literature Association, which sought to establish ecocriticism as a critical approach. Another milestone was the appointment of the first professor of Literature and Environment, namely, Cheryll Glotfelty, who was hired by the University of Nevada–Reno in 1990. In 1996, she published *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), co-edited with Harold Fromm. Since then, this method has attracted numerous practitioners, spawned various MLA panels, generated at least two journals (*ISLE* and *The Electronic Green Journal*) which examine the intersections of literature and the environment, and led to the creation of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment.

Definitions of the term “ecocriticism” vary depending on the scholar. Glotfelty’s introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* refers to it as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” Buell’s formulation is as follows: “Ecocriticism is an umbrella term . . . used to refer to the environmentally-oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice.” And Jim Dwyer defines ecocriticism as “a critical perspective on the relationship between literature and the natural world, and the place of humanity within—not separate from—nature.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, literary critics have been studying representations of nature for years, so it might well be asked, Is ecocriticism truly novel? As Russell Hitt quips, “[D]oes ecocriticism merely put old wine in a new (recyclable) bottle?” (124).<sup>8</sup> Hitt answers his own rhetorical question by noting that ecocriticism is distinguished from traditional nature-oriented literary studies in its emphasis on activism. This commitment to ethical engagement is echoed by other ecocritics such as Simon Estok, who writes that this method “has distinguished itself . . . first by its ethical stance of commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an *object of thematic study* and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections” (198). In its activism, ecocriticism is similar to other politically engaged scholarship such as feminism and Marxism, and in fact sometimes combined with them: Ecofeminism is an important sub-species of ecocriticism, and Marxist critic Raymond Williams is, as we saw, a crucial forerunner of environmental approaches to literature.

Ecocritical interpreters tend to focus on linguistic representations of nature, particularly on metaphors of the natural world, personifications of it, and the pathetic fallacy. They also emphasize the importance of

place within texts, to the extent that some have proposed that “place” be considered as essential to literary criticism as race, class, and gender are for many scholars. Glotfelty’s withering assessment is relevant here:

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth’s life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know there was an earth at all. (xvi)

Other related concerns for environmental criticism include the role of animals within narratives, and the intersection of science and literature. It is also worth noting ecocriticism’s increasing range: While ecocritics initially focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century nature writers like Thoreau and Annie Dillard, their scope has expanded to include earlier figures such as Shakespeare and Chaucer, and authors who are not normally thought of as “ecological” writers, such as Sylvia Plath.<sup>9</sup>

### **Ecocriticism and Christianity: Common Ground**

Why has ecocriticism emerged as a critical method relatively recently, well after the advent of other activist perspectives such as Marxism and feminism? To answer this question is to begin to see its compatibility with Christianity. One major reason for ecocriticism’s comparatively late entrance on the critical scene is its belief in objective reality, and the corollary stance that reality is at least partially accessible to human observation. Such a belief made it less possible for ecocriticism to gain traction throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s, when post-structuralism, especially strong constructivist views, were in the ascendant. That changed somewhat when historicism succeeded post-structuralism, as the New Historicists attempted to situate texts in their original contexts, one of which was often nature itself. Yet as Lawrence Buell points out, New Historicism ultimately tended to dismiss the “mimetic function” of literature and art (*Environmental Imagination* 86).

However, by the mid-1990s, some critics began questioning the putative inability of literature to refer to reality, and as noted earlier, it was at this point that ecocriticism started to take hold. The publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) was a key event, as we saw; so was Buell’s 1995 study, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the*

*Formation of American Culture*. Buell's monograph was, in fact, one of the first theoretically-informed ecocritical studies, and one of the first to argue that the "discrediting of realism as an attempted transparency" had been excessive (87). *The Environmental Imagination* makes the case for realism and accuracy in nature writing, while acknowledging the considerable role that the imagination plays in our perceptions of the world. In the book, Buell recognized that he was swimming against then-dominant critical tides: "All major strains of contemporary literary theory have marginalized literature's referential dimension by privileging structure, text(uality), ideology, or some other conceptual matrix that defines the space discourse occupies apart from factual 'reality'" (86). Still, his claim was eventually seconded by other critics who also were questioning the radical skepticism about the representation of objective reality.

It also seems likely that the environmental crisis has played a part in the rise of ecocriticism, and in the questioning of strong constructivist positions. Perhaps the biggest obstacle for such positions is the sheer "thereness" of nature, independent, to some degree, of our cultural formations or linguistic constructs. Ursula Heise puts it well when she argues that

Poststructuralists ... [present] nature as a purely discursive construction. But like feminists and race theorists who emphasized the cultural rather than biological grounding of their objects of study, these critics must face the objection that such a view plays into the enemy's hand by obfuscating the material reality of environmental degradation ... In the end, it seems likely that strong constructivist positions will be less convincing to ecocritics, many of whom are also green activists, than weak constructivist ones that analyze cultural constructions of nature with a view toward the *constraints that the real environment imposes on them*. (512; emphasis mine).

Heise touches here on a major ecocritical tenet that I have already cited, and which, I think, many Christian scholars would agree with: the belief in an external reality and in our ability, however partial, to apprehend reality. This view, sometimes called critical realism, has been espoused mainly in defenses of the natural sciences, in opposition to radical constructivist, post-Kuhnian perspectives. It has also been advocated by Christian thinkers such as Michael Polanyi, T. F. Torrance, John Polkinghorne, Alister McGrath, and Bernard Lonergan. And it has been linked with ecocriticism: In a *New York Times* article titled "Greening the Humanities," Jay Parini writes that

ecocriticism “marks a re-engagement with realism, with the actual universe of rocks, trees, and rivers that lies behind the wilderness of signs” (1).

This is not to say, of course, that Christians must reject constructivism out of hand. Christian philosophers such as James K. A. Smith, for instance, provide sympathetic and compelling treatments of key constructivist tenets such as Derrida’s well-known formulation, “il n’y pas d’hors texte,” (“there is nothing outside the text”) in works such as *Who’s Afraid of Post-Modernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Just so, David Downing has shown that C. S. Lewis, whose apologetic works often deploy traditional logic and reasoning, nonetheless has his post-structuralist moments as well.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, however, Lewis and other Christian thinkers, while fully acknowledging the creative element of our perceptions, still subscribe to the notion of a transcendent reality, one that can be grasped, albeit incompletely. Such confidence arises from our belief that the world is real because it is created by an omnipotent, transcendent God, as opposed to Gnostic views, according to which the world is either an illusion conjured by the demi-urge, or one that, though physical, is botched by an inept, limited creator. The doctrine of the Incarnation is also essential here, of course, as it inculcates a deep respect for the materiality and essential goodness of creation. Furthermore, we believe that God has gifted us to discover truths about the created order. The fact that ecocriticism often espouses a similar confidence in the given-ness of nature, and in human knowledge of it, makes it compatible with Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Another, related principle of ecocriticism is its belief that not only is the natural world real and knowable, it possesses inherent worth, apart from human concern. As we saw, Simon Estok notes that ecocriticism values nature “as an important thing rather than simply *an object of thematic study*” (198). The source of Estok’s own belief in nature’s intrinsic value is not spelled out, nor does it tend to be in other ecocritical discourse. Nonetheless, such a view accords with the Genesis creation account, in which God pronounces the results of each day’s work as “good,” even before humanity is created on the sixth day. If one adopts a day-age view of the Genesis creation account, which holds that each of the days in Genesis refers to extensive periods or ages of time, that would mean that the entire creation flourished for eons, approved by God, long before humanity appeared.

To round out my brief summary of the consonance of Christianity and ecocriticism, it is worth mentioning that a number of modern and

contemporary nature writers are either Christians or sympathetic to Christianity. Annie Dillard converted to Roman Catholicism in 1990, Wendell Berry is a life-long Baptist, and essayist Bill McKibben teaches Sunday School in a Methodist church. Poet Denise Levertov was a Catholic until her death in 1997; novelist Marilynne Robinson is a Congregationalist; poet Mary Oliver, an Episcopalian; and poet-essayist Terry Tempest Williams, a Mormon. Granted, Berry is critical of environmentalists when they ignore or downplay human concerns; in one of his agrarian essays he notes that “when we include ourselves as parts or belongings of the world we are trying to preserve, then obviously we can no longer think of the world as ‘the environment’—something out there around us. We can see that our relation to the world surpasses mere connection and verges on identity” (qtd. in Major 64). And Dillard has recently protested on her official website, “I am not eco-anything, nor have I ever been.” She also declares that “I have no religions, or many religions.”<sup>12</sup> Yet the fact remains that for her as well as others in this list, Christian themes such as the Incarnation figure prominently, as do basic philosophical commitments such as realism.

### Ecocritical Challenges to Christianity

Still, to claim that Christian theology is compatible with various tenets of ecocriticism raises certain questions: How far does that compatibility extend? To what extent can a scholar be simultaneously committed to the Bible and to ecocriticism, or, for that matter, to any environmental stance? On one hand, Buell rightly observes that “environmentalism itself is, or at least entails, a faith commitment” (“Religion,” 234), so grounding that commitment in the scriptures would seem to be a plausible move. The problem, however, is that while the Bible offers narratives such as Creation and the Incarnation that can inculcate an appreciation of nature, it also is full of stories of divine acts that may be regarded as nothing short of ecocide, that is, as causing large-scale destruction of the environment. In Genesis alone, for instance, the Deluge drowns all humans, excepting Noah and his family, as well as every bird, beast, and insect not on board the ark, and undoubtedly a vast number of plants and trees as well, though these are not mentioned. Later in Genesis, God rains down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the process obliterates “all those cities and all the plain and all the inhabitants of the cities *and what grew in the soil*” (19:24-25; emphasis mine). To this day, this area is known as the Dead Sea. Just so, in Exodus God metes out the plagues on the recalcitrant Pharaoh. The first



consists of the Nile being completely turned to blood, with all its fish dying (7:17, 18), and another is a massive locust swarm, one that "consumed all the grass of the land and every fruit of the tree ... [so that] nothing green in tree or in grass of the field was left in all the land of Egypt" (10: 15, 16).<sup>13</sup>

Nor does the New Testament offer much relief: In two of the gospels, Jesus is depicted as destroying a fig tree (Mark 11:14-21; Matt. 21:18-22). And in Revelation, environmental devastation flows thick and fast, with God's angels at one point blowing trumpets to call down hail, fire, and blood on the earth, thereby scorching a full third of its surface, and burning up all green grass (8:7), and at another, poisoning a third of all the waters on earth (8:10, 11). Later in the book, angels pour out bowls of wrath that, among other things, kill every living thing in the sea (16:3) and turn all rivers and springs of water to blood (16:4).

I am quoting selectively, of course, yet one could argue for a pattern here, to wit, God's willingness to demolish elements of the natural world as a judgment on human depravity. However, doing justice to such a question would far exceed my space limitations and quickly derail my line of argument. Hence, to focus the matter within an ecocritical context, I turn to Lynn White, Jr.'s famous and controversial essay on Christianity and the environmental crisis, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." I do so with some reluctance, recognizing that the essay has been rightly criticized as overly simplistic, and perhaps as garnering more respect and attention than it deserves. Nevertheless, White's argument is vital to an understanding of the ecocritical scene. First published in 1967, it is the lead essay in Glotfelty's pioneering collection, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, and is frequently referenced by environmental critics. It has also served to frame the ensuing debates over many ecological issues, two of which I will take up here. These include an understanding of the biblical creation account and the problem of anthropocentrism.

Various Christian commentators, including Wendell Berry and eco-theologian James A. Nash, have responded to White.<sup>14</sup> I wish to do so as well, emphasizing what is seldom remarked on in summaries and quotations of White, namely, the explicitly religious qualities of his diagnosis and solution. Few essays, it seems to me, have been so misrepresented as White's. Judging from popular appropriations of it, one might guess that he was a secularist zealot, a proto-Richard Dawkins lambasting Christianity. In fact, White speaks from a Christian context, referring to himself as a "churchman" (12); he was a lifelong Presbyterian, and contributed regularly to church publications.

White's main argument is that the roots of our present environmental crisis lie in Christianity, which argues that "man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature" (10). While White does not quote the Bible in the essay, he is clearly indebted to Genesis 1 and 2, especially 1: 28, the famous "dominion" passage: "And God blessed them, and God said to [Adam and Eve], 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it, and hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and every beast that crawls upon the earth.'" White seems to have this passage in mind when he summarizes the Genesis creation account, contrasting it with Graeco-Roman thought by claiming that according to Genesis "the visible world had a beginning," and that God

created Adam, and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And [Adam] is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image. (9)

White also contends that the marriage of scientific theory and technology is "the greatest event in human history since the invention of agriculture" (4-5), and that both theory and technology flow directly from Christianity. The first theory is "an extrapolation of natural theology," while technology "is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature." Their union bestowed on "mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control." If so, he concludes, "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" (12).

His proposed remedy, as I have suggested, may surprise those unaware of White's own faith commitment: He contends that "since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, *the remedy must also be essentially religious*" (14, emphasis mine). He then offers St. Francis as a model of environmental stewardship, first because Francis "tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures" (13), and also, because Francis attempted to "substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation" (14).

Responses to White have varied considerably, yet the majority focus on his exegesis of Genesis. Berry and others argue with some justification that White misses the point of the verses in question. Berry, for instance,

complicates the claim that Adam's naming of the animals "establish[ed] his dominance over them":

There is no doubt that Adam's superiority over the rest of Creation was represented ... by this act of naming; he *was* given dominance. But that this dominance was meant to be tyrannical, or that "subdue [the earth]" means to destroy, is by no means a necessary inference. Indeed, it might be argued that the correct understanding of this "dominance" is given in Genesis 2:15, which says that Adam and Eve were put into the Garden "to dress and keep it."<sup>15</sup>

White responded to the charge that he had misread the biblical texts in a 1973 essay, contending that he was referring to how the verses had actually been used in history, rather than what they were supposed to mean.<sup>16</sup> He has a point here: The Bible has been, and continues to be, read and misread to underwrite environmental destruction. To take a contemporary example, the current website of The Kentucky Coal Association features the famous verse from Isaiah 40, from the New American Bible translation, "Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low," to justify the practice of mountain-top removal.<sup>17</sup> Now, if such egregious abuses of scripture did not contribute to ecological devastation, it would be easy to dismiss them. As it is, however, White is partly correct and the church must shoulder some of the blame for such misappropriations of biblical texts.

At the same time, White's charge provides an opportunity for ecocritics to defend the Bible, to show that potentially exploitative verses are counterbalanced by others. Many of the passages I have in mind have been marshaled by ecotheologians; Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all the fullness thereof" is one example. Others are less known but equally striking, including one near the end of Revelation 11. At this point in the book, an angel, the seventh of seven angels who stand before God (8:2), blows his trumpet, and heavenly voices begin speaking words later set to music by Handel: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever." Shortly thereafter, the 24 elders, who had been sitting on their thrones before God, now prostrate themselves before Him and declare,

We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding

your servants, the prophets, and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and *for destroying those who destroy the earth.* (11:15-18; emphasis mine)<sup>18</sup>

Who might these “destroyers” be? The verse does not, of course, refer to any modern-day despoliation of the earth; rather, as Christopher Rowland suggests, 11:18 is amplified by a later verse in Revelation, 19:2, in which the narrator hears a loud multitude who cry out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who *corrupted the earth* with her fornication” (emphasis mine). Bruce Metzger identifies this harlot with Rome. Hence, Rome is linked with corruption and destruction of the earth, involving idolatry and blasphemy, yet such spiritual sins have a physical effect on the earth itself, and must therefore be punished accordingly.<sup>19</sup>

The Old Testament also offers some remarkable passages pertaining to the environment. In *Sand County Almanac* (1949), one of the most canonical of green texts, ecologist Aldo Leopold proposes what he calls a “land ethic,” one that values soil, water, and other natural features for their intrinsic worth. He does so, in part, by disparaging what he refers to as the “Abrahamic concept of land,” by which he means the view that the Israelites regarded the Promised Land as a mere possession, rather than having inherent value. In Leopold’s mordant summation, “Abraham knew what the land was for—the land was to drip milk and honey into Abraham’s mouth.”<sup>20</sup> Yet a careful reading of the Torah indicates otherwise. For instance, in Leviticus God reminds the Jews that He, not they, is the land’s owner: “Mine is the land” (25:23). And God often speaks of the land as if it does possess intrinsic significance, sometimes by personifying it. For instance, he warns the Jews that in coming into the Promised Land, “you shall keep all of My laws and do them, lest the land to which I bring you to dwell there *spew you out*” (Lev. 20:22; emphasis mine). In like manner, God decrees that “When you come into the land that I am to give you, the land shall keep a sabbath to the Lord” (Lev. 25:3). That is, every seven years no sowing or reaping was to take place; the soil was to lie fallow.

The importance of this fallow period is underscored in an astonishing section from the conclusion of 2 Chronicles, one worth quoting at length. Here, the author explains that the captivity of the Jews was permitted as retribution for their failing to keep the land’s sabbath:

Therefore [God] brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who

killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand. All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of God, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, *until the land had made up for its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.* (26: 17-21; emphasis mine)

Also deserving of mention here is Job, which has been interpreted ecocritically by Bill McKibben in his 1994 book, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*. In it he argues that God's reply to Job offers a bracing antidote to narcissistic consumer culture. While malls, suburbs, and cities are "designed with human beings at the very center, manicured to remove the thorns and sloped to drain the swamps," the view of nature set forth in God's speech is that of a vast, wild, teeming, and ferocious realm (41). Moreover, McKibben adds that the speech limns a "world without people—a world that existed long before people, and that seems to have its own independent meaning," based on passages such as God's question to Job,

Who cuts a path for the thunderstorm  
and carves a road for the rain—  
to water the desolate wasteland,  
the land where no man lives;  
to make the wilderness blossom  
and cover the desert with grass?<sup>21</sup>

In sum, then, White's critique of the Bible is open to question. Yet he levels another, related charge that may present a stiffer challenge to would-be Christian ecocritics. The allegation is expressed in various ways. To introduce it, White provides an illustration from the history of technology, that is, the development of the plow in the middle ages, from simple early devices called "scratch plows," which did not damage the earth's surface much, to newer, larger ones, requiring eight oxen to pull, which "attacked the land with such violence that cross-plowing was not needed." White

concludes that as a result of this technological innovation, while “formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature” (8). He then declares, “[e]specially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen” (9). According to its teaching, “Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions ... not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (10).

White’s rejection of anthropocentrism is explicitly echoed by many in the environmental movement, particularly in formulations of what is perhaps the key concept in ecocriticism, ecocentrism. Ecocentrism, according to Lawrence Buell, claims that “the interest of the ecosphere must override that of the interest of the individual species” (“Future,” 137). He also observes that “biocentrism” is the corollary of ecocentrism, the difference being that biocentrism is “the view that all organisms including humans are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest” (134). These two synonymous terms are regarded as the antitheses of anthropocentrism.

Hence, we may ask, is Christianity guilty of anthropocentrism? Some bible verses certainly seem anthropocentric. In addition to the “dominion” verses, there is Psalm 8, which is quoted in the New Testament, and which, according to Robert Alter, is intended to remind readers of Gen. 1:28, especially verses 6-8, which he translates as follows:

You [God] have given them [humanity] dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

The New Testament offers seemingly anthropocentric passages as well. For instance, upon commissioning and sending out the 12 apostles, Jesus addresses them at some length, telling them at one point, “Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31; NRSV). Then again, as we have seen, other passages seem to privilege nature over humanity, at least temporarily. One is the Jewish captivity, which seems to have been brought about, in part, to allow the land its allotted rest.

What are we to make of this conflicting evidence? To answer this thorny question, I begin by invoking Buell’s helpful distinctions between “strong” and “weak” anthropocentrisms. The first holds that “human interests

should prevail," while the latter is based on the conviction that "zero-degree anthropocentrism is not feasible or desirable" ("Future," 134). I know of no ecocritic, Christian or otherwise, who argues that human interests should always trump all others. However, I think it possible to make a case for a "weak" anthropocentrism, one that strives for greater eco- and bio-centrism, while simultaneously recognizing that a certain role has been imposed on humanity in relation to nature.

For one thing, we are far and away the dominant species. We have mapped and measured the environment so thoroughly that it is difficult to imagine any truly virgin spaces left in the world. This "global biosurveillance," to use David Mazel's term, is the sum total of

the vast and growing complex of activities that enable us ... to strip [nature] of layer after layer of what used to be spoken of as its "mystery" ... Global biosurveillance produces these effects in ways so numerous and varied that I can only begin to list them here: by monitoring the temperature and chemical composition of the atmosphere; by tracking the temperature of the oceans and the circulation of marine nutrients; by recording the movements of migratory wildlife as animals and birds distribute themselves across an international system of flyways and refuges; by "mapping" the genomes of a variety of species; and by deploying any number of a rapidly proliferating number of other techniques for rendering nature increasingly transparent. (186)

Furthermore, Mazel surveys a number of recent, related developments such as postmodern ecology, cyborgism, gene splicing, and emergence, each of which "has the potential to implicate the biosphere so completely in human affairs that at some not-too-distant point it might make more sense to think of [the biosphere] as a technosphere: a 'world designed by people'" (186). He adds that a number of institutions of higher learning, such as the University of Colorado, currently offer programs in disciplines such as "earth systems engineering," the goal of which, according to the National Academy of Engineering website, is "better understanding of the challenges posed by complex, nonlinear systems of global importance—notably environmental systems—and development of tools that respond effectively to those challenges" (qtd. in Mazel 194).

Second, our dominance as a species seems to be confirmed by the Anthropic Principle. The Principle is well-known and debated in the sciences, but ecocriticism has not yet come to grips with its implications.

The term was coined at a 1973 symposium celebrating Copernicus, by British theoretical astrophysicist Brandon Carter, in a paper titled "Large Number Coincidences and the Anthropic Principle in Cosmology." In response to the Copernican Principle, which holds that we do not occupy any special place in the cosmos, Carter replied, "Although our position is not necessarily *central*, it is inevitably privileged to some extent." Cultural historian Dennis Danielson defines the Principle as follows: "A set of claims (with varying strong and weak formulations) integral with the recognition that the universe must be conceived to be such that observers like us could have come, did come, and perhaps must have come to exist within it" (529). Similarly, Eric Deeson, a science educator, calls the Principle "a paradox of modern astronomy ... that the universe is the way it is because we—carbon-based creatures—are here to observe it, rather than that we are here because the universe is the way it is" (19).

Examples of our apparently privileged position in the cosmos abound. One is our location: Within the solar system Jupiter shields Earth from asteroids and comets, while the moon stabilizes our planet's rotation. We live, moreover, in what physicist James Lovelock calls "The Goldilocks Zone" within the Milky Way, a region "just right" for life because it is positioned ideally in the galaxy: If our sun, which revolves around the galaxy's center, were too far out in the galaxy's spiral arms, we would be in danger; too close to the center, and we would be exposed to excessive radiation. As astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez explains, spiral arms "are dangerous places. Massive star supernovae are concentrated there, and giant molecular clouds can perturb the Oort cloud comets leading to more comet showers in the inner solar system." Noting that our sun's circular orbit around the galaxy contrasts with the more elliptical rotations of other stars approximately the same age as ours, Gonzalez observes that "if the Sun's orbit about the galactic center were less circular, the Sun would be more likely to cross spiral arms" (para. 18-19).

Furthermore, the entire cosmos seems to be finely tuned to an astonishing degree. Perhaps the most striking example of this precision is what Einstein called the "cosmological constant," and which has recently been labeled "dark energy." Contrary to common sense, interstellar space is not vacant; rather, there is an anti-gravitational force that pervades it, namely, the cosmological constant. According to physicist Steven Weinberg, if the constant were "large and positive," it would "act as a repulsive force that would prevent matter from clumping together in the early universe, the



process that was the first step in forming galaxies and stars and planets and people." On the other hand, Weinberg explains, if it were "large and negative ... [it] would act as an attractive force increasing with distance, a force that would almost immediately reverse the expansion of the universe and cause it to re-collapse, leaving no time for the evolution of life." In fact, the cosmological constant is surprisingly small, "very much smaller," according to Weinberg, "than would have been guessed from first principles (par. 16).<sup>22</sup> And its exactness is astounding—the least tweaking of this balance would either obliterate the universe, and all organic life as well, or prevent it from ever coming into being in the first place.

At this point some readers might object that the Anthropic Principle is irrelevant to the question of ecocentrism, since the Principle shows that the cosmos seems to privilege all carbon-based life, not just humanity. However, the point of the Principle is not only that the universe seems to favor such forms, but that human beings alone have been able to discover that fact. In other words, while animals are certainly aware of various features of the physical world—birds, for example, scan the landscape while migrating, and sea turtles may navigate by the constellations—as far as we know only human beings reflect on the world's physical structure, its vastness and its appearance of fine-tuning.

In sum, it seems clear that regardless of how we explain or interpret it, our location and standing in the universe is central, at least in terms of constituting an ideal place for life to arise, flourish, and reflect on itself. So, while we may protest against anthropocentrism, to argue for its total elimination is to turn a blind eye to the facts. Moreover, to call for a thoroughgoing ecocentrism (or biocentrism) opens us up to the critique leveled at all centrisms. As Robert Wess notes, "the core critique of centrism is that discourses are situated, not transcendently centrist, because they are composed by human beings in concrete circumstances ... Stanley Fish sums up the core of the critique succinctly: 'We are never not in a situation'" (1-2).<sup>23</sup> At times theorists have leveled this critique against discourses such as logocentrism and Eurocentrism, but the argument is double-edged, and can also be applied to ecocentrism and biocentrism. That is, while ecocentrism and biocentrism express noble goals, it is, finally, impossible for us fully to transcend our own identities to imagine a world that is utterly "egalitarian," with all species having equal claims on one another. We are all, always and already, inescapably anthropocentric. The question then becomes, How to act responsibly in this role? Will we be stewards or despots?

The most promising answer, it seems to me, is one that holds in creative tension the claims of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. If we incline to a strong anthropocentrism, we end up devaluing and despoiling the creation, yet if we embrace a thorough-going ecocentrism, we abdicate the responsibilities placed on us by our power as a species. I believe this kind of tension is exemplified in a number of ways. For instance, Jesus' comment on the sparrows needs to be understood in its fuller context. Yes, we are worth more than many sparrows—yet “not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father” (10:29; NIV). Similarly, while Christian writers such as George MacDonald, J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis all held traditional, hierarchical views of the universe, their fiction can often be quite ecocentric. For instance, in MacDonald's book *At the Back of the North Wind*, the protagonist, a boy named Diamond, lives in a hayloft, separated from the livestock only by a few feet. Moreover, he is named, not after his father, as we might expect, but after his father's favorite horse. And throughout the story the narrator makes no value distinction between the boy and the horse. In an ecocritical discussion of the tale, Bjorn Sundmark contends that this book “crosses ‘the insuperable line,’ that is, the categorization in absolute terms of human/animal” (3-4). Tolkien's *Legendarium*, especially *The Silmarillion*, is striking for many reasons, including the fact that in some respects it marginalizes human interests and claims to those represented by the Elves. And Lewis often portrays anthropocentrism in a negative light; for example, in *Prince Caspian*, the usurping King Miraz wishes to exterminate the Old Narnians because he and the other Telemarines despise all that is non-human.

Moreover, the kind of creative tension I am advocating is evident in the work of green theorists. Buell, for instance, asserts that “[i]t is entirely possible to maintain without hypocrisy biocentric values while recognizing that in practice these must be constrained by anthropocentric considerations, whether as a matter of strategy or a matter of intractable human self-interestedness” (“Future,” 134). And Robert Kern's study of ecocentrism in the work of selected American writers, including Emerson, Thoreau, Abbey, Berry, Stevens, and Wilbur, explores the paradox that ecocentric discourse can only be fabricated in human, poetic language.

### What Christian Scholars Can Offer Ecocriticism

Having offered a case for why Christian literary scholars might consider practicing ecocriticism, I conclude by asking the converse: What, if anything, could Christian literary scholarship offer ecocriticism? I will touch briefly on three areas.

To start with, literary scholars who are Christians or at least sympathetic to Christianity can shed light on classic ecocritical texts that might have been overlooked or downplayed by other critics. John Gatta's 2004 study *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* constitutes a first-rate example of this approach. He examines various canonical environmental writers such as Thoreau, Muir, Dillard, Aldo Leopold, and others for their religious and biblical elements. For instance, while Thoreau's religious thought is usually regarded as pantheistic and indebted to Asian religions, Gatta argues convincingly that several sections in *Walden*, especially the much-discussed sand folio passage, demonstrate "the influence of biblical Christianity and hermeneutics on Thoreau's religious outlook" (264).

One of the most compelling sections of *Making Nature Sacred* is Gatta's discussion of Leopold. Curt Meine, the ecologist's biographer, notes that Leopold's grandfather was "a Lutheran but not a churchgoer," that his father "took a dim view of preachers," and that his father "left [Aldo and his siblings] to their own devices" when it came to religion (15-16). As an adult Leopold attended church just twice, once for his own wedding, and once for his youngest daughter's wedding (121-122; 418). On the other hand, Leopold certainly seemed to have practiced a kind of natural religion, and while he was critical of the "Abrahamic land ethic," as we saw, he read some parts of the Bible quite sympathetically, from a conservation standpoint. For instance, in 1920 he published an article in the *Journal of Forestry* called "The Forestry of the Prophets," which explored the references to forests in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Leopold labeled Isaiah "the [Theodore] Roosevelt of the Holy Land" and Job "the John Muir of Judah" (qtd. in Meine 183). He also regarded Joel as "the preacher of the conservation of watersheds" (qtd. in Meine 183). Furthermore, Meine contends that Leopold "was probably thinking of himself when . . . he wrote [in *Sand County Almanac*], 'I heard of a boy once who was brought up an atheist. He changed his mind when he saw that there were a hundred-odd species of warblers, each bedecked like to the rainbow . . . I dare say this boy's convictions would be harder to shake than those of many inductive theologians'" (27).

Gatta explicates the most famous section of *Sand County Almanac*, called "Thinking Like a Mountain," in which Leopold writes of a momentous personal experience. As a young man, Leopold was hired by the Park Service to help rid the national parks of wolves, bears, cougars, and other

predators. One day, while taking a lunch break, he spotted some wolves, at which point he and his companions leapt up and gunned them down. One hung on for a few minutes, and as he observed her death-throes, Leopold had an epiphany:

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then ... that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with me. (138-39)

He then draws this conclusion: Predators, too, play a vital role in any healthy ecosystem.

Gatta contends that this episode “amounts to what ... early Puritans would immediately recognize as a conversion narrative. Surviving well beyond the Puritan era, it is a form in which one soul's passage from self-reproach and a ‘true sight of sin’ to gracious self-renewal offers a public model of transformation for the benefit of others” (59). He concedes that Leopold does not offer an “explicit, Puritan-style avowal of contrition for sin,” but remarks that the episode “draws on the rhetoric of traditional conversion narratives by demonstrating how an unsettling personal experience can lead not only to an amendment of life but also to a change of heart and mind” (59). Gatta also observes Leopold's use of religious terminology in his famous misquotation of Thoreau at the end of “Thinking Like a Mountain.” While Thoreau had written that “in Wildness is the preservation of the World,” Leopold states that “in wildness is the *salvation* of the world” (59, emphasis mine).

Another way Christian literary scholars can contribute to ecocriticism is by identifying environmental elements in Christian writers, including ones we might not immediately think of as being, in any sense, ecological. Matthew Dickerson's scholarship is a case in point. He has co-authored two splendid environmental studies, one on Tolkien, one on Lewis. Although I have touched on certain ecological resonances of each writer's work, it still might seem anachronistic to regard either figure as practicing a green ethic. Yet in his 2006 study, *Elves, Ents, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien*, co-authored with Jonathan Evans, and his 2010 book, *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C. S. Lewis*, co-

written with David O'Hara, Dickerson makes a compelling case for both men demonstrating significant ecological thinking in their life and work. Of Lewis, for instance, he argues that "running throughout the majority of Lewis's work are both the philosophical and theological underpinnings, and also the practical outworking, of what can be understood as a profound and healthy ecology: the tenets of good environmentalism" (13, 14).

Finally, if ecocriticism aims to be a truly ethical practice, one engaged in changing the world, then surely Christian scholars have a role to play, not only in our scholarship, but also by virtue of our church involvement. In a recent essay titled "Bridging the Great Divide," which carries the humorous subtitle "Ecocritical Theory and the Great Unwashed," ecocritic Simon Estok laments the fact that ecocritics have had little impact on public debates about the environment. He concludes that "[w]hether through journalism or narrative, ecocritics have to address the issue of values in ways that connect meaningfully with the non-academic world. If it means through *50 Things You Can Do to Save the Earth*, fine. We can't afford professional bigotry. We're losing and it's time to start winning" (208). Estok's sentiments are certainly well taken, but he overlooks a sizeable, if largely untapped resource, namely, the North American church. For as eco-philosopher Fritz Oelschlaeger contends, religion is "the only form of discourse widely available to Americans (through the institution of the church) that expresses social interests going beyond the private interests articulated through economic discourse and institutionalized in the market" (qtd. in Buell, "Religion," 233). Hence, Christian environmental scholars can nurture and enrich ecological discourse by appealing to our fellow parishioners with the narrative, poetic, and rhetorical resources at our disposal.

Similarly, we can draw encouragement from an increasing number of Christian ministries that focus on environmental issues. In the conclusion to *Making Nature Sacred*, Gatta notes that "faith-sponsored calls for conversion to sustainable living seem comparatively rare. They also seem to have little immediate impact. A recent Christian evangelical campaign to conserve fossil fuel, launched under the provocative slogan 'What would Jesus drive?' has not yet moved American to abandon their SUVs" (246). However, since 2004, when Gatta wrote those words, environmental awareness has burgeoned among Christians across a variety of denominations. Various Christian ministries and websites devoted solely to ecological problems have either sprung up or are now enjoying a higher profile than they did even just five years ago. Among these are The Evangelical Environmental

Network, Plant with Purpose, the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies, The Evangelical Ecologist blog, and the cross-cultural ecological ministry, A Rocha. And the BP oil disaster—unfortunately referred to most commonly by the euphemistic term “spill”—in the summer of 2010 has also raised the national consciousness about ecological problems, both within and outside the church. Hence, as Christian environmental scholars we can make common cause with environmental groups that are doing useful work, thereby fulfilling, in part, the ethical imperative inherent not only in ecocriticism but in our faith as well.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The *Christianity and Literature* (*C&L*) 58.2 (2009) essays include Mitchell Harris, “Behind the Barricades with Lenin? Making Sense of the Marxist Turn to Christianity in the Literature Classroom”: 220-26; Kathryn Ludwig, “Post-secularism and a Prophetic Sensibility”: 226-33; Yolanda Pierce, “African-American Literature as Spiritual Witness: The Poetic Example of Margaret Alexander Walker”: 233-37; and Norman W. Jones, “The Challenge of Christianity for Gay and Lesbian Criticism—and Vice Versa”: 238-43. Jens Zimmerman makes a compelling case for a post-post-modern neo-humanism in “*Quo Vadis? Literary Theory Beyond Postmodernism*,” *C&L* 53.4 (2004): 495-519. For sympathetic treatments of post-structuralism, see David C. Downing, “From Pillar to Post-modernism: C. S. Lewis and Current Critical Discourse,” *C&L* 46.2 (1997): 169-78; John McManmon, “Formalism, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Text” in *C&L* 40.1 (1990): 57-67; and Janet Blumberg Knedlick, “Saussure, Derrida, and a ‘Christian’ Literary Criticism,” *C&L* 39.3 (1990): 293-302. Other examples in *C&L* of attempts to integrate Christianity and literary criticism include John S. Reist, Jr., “Centrifugal and Centripetal Power: Bonhoeffer’s Theology as a Model for Christian Literary Criticism,” *C&L* 28.1 (1978): 43-52, and Robert K. Johnston, “Interpreting Scripture: Literary Criticism and Evangelical Hermeneutics,” *C&L* 32.1 (1982): 33-47. For environmentally-informed analyses of specific works, see Todd Davis, “The Earth as God’s Body: Incarnation as Communion in the Poetry of Mary Oliver,” *C&L* 58.4 (2009): 605-24 and Pam Fox Kulkhen, “Hallowed Ground: Landscape as Hagiography in Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*,” *C&L* 52.3 (2003): 367-85. Finally, it is worth noting Caleb D. Spencer’s skepticism regarding all attempts to interpret from a Christian perspective. In “What Counts as Christian Criticism?” in *C&L* 58.2 (2009): 273-81, he argues that “the notion of Christian criticism is simply a mistake” (279).

<sup>2</sup>*Christian Scholar’s Review* published a “Special Issue on Christianity and Envi-

ronmentalism," 28.2 (1998), and a "Theme Issue: The Fate of the Earth," 32.4 (2003). Both feature a number of useful essays, including Loren Wilkinson's article "Pilgrims at Home: The Mutual Challenge of Christendom and Environmental Literature," which appears in "The Fate of the Earth" issue.

<sup>3</sup>For a useful overview of the intersection of religion and ecology, one that includes considerations of writers influenced by Buddhism (Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder), Daoism (Ursula K. LeGuin), "earthism" (Edward Abbey), and Mormonism (Terry Tempest Williams), as well as writers in the Protestant tradition (Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry), see David Landis Barnhill's article, "The Spiritual Dimension of Nature Writing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford University Press, 2006): 419-45. Notable monographs that touch on ecocriticism, albeit briefly, include John Gatta's *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans, *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2006); and Dickerson and David O'Hara, *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C. S. Lewis* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>To understand Oelschlaeger's rationale for this claim, see my conclusion.

<sup>5</sup>Heise's own overview of the movement in "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism" is also beneficial.

<sup>6</sup>See Coupe, "Kenneth Burke: Pioneer of Ecocriticism," *Journal of American Studies* 35.3 (2001): 413-31.

<sup>7</sup>See Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii; Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 138; Dwyer, 1.

<sup>8</sup>Hitt's remark appears in "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century" 124.

<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, Hitt's greening of certain writers of the Long Eighteenth Century; Knickerbocker's study of Sylvia Plath's eco-poetics; Stanbury, "EcoChaucer;" and the summer 2005 issue of *ISLE* (The Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and the Environment), 12.2, which is dedicated to Shakespeare and ecocriticism.

<sup>10</sup>For instance, Lewis' conclusion to *The Discarded Image* strikingly anticipates Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*:

We are all, very properly, familiar with the idea that in every age the human mind is deeply influenced by the accepted Model of the universe. But there is two-way traffic; the Model is also influenced by the prevailing temper of mind. We must recognize that what has been called 'a taste in universes' is not only pardonable but inevitable. We can no longer dismiss the change of Models as a simple progress from error to truth. No Model is a catalogue of ultimate realities, and none is a mere fantasy. Each is a serious attempt to get in all the phenomena known at a given period, and each succeeds in getting in a great many. But also, no less surely, each reflects the prevalent psychology of an age almost as much as it reflects the state of that age's

knowledge ... It is not impossible that our own Model will die a violent death ... But I think it is more likely to change when, and because, far-reaching changes in the mental temper of our descendants demand that it should. It will not be set up without evidence, but the evidence will turn up when the inner need for it becomes sufficiently great. It will be true evidence. But nature gives most of her evidence in answer to the questions we ask her. Here, as in the courts, the character of the evidence depends on the shape of the examination, and a good cross-examiner can do wonders. (222-23)

<sup>11</sup>There are post-structuralist approaches to ecocriticism. See, for instance, SueEllen Campbell, "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet," Neil Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* (1992), and Michael E. Soule and Gary Lease, *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (1995).

<sup>12</sup>Dillard's comments can be found at <http://www.anniedillard.com>.

<sup>13</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Old Testament references are from Alter.

<sup>14</sup>White's essay first appeared in *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-07. Berry's response to White, "The Gift of Good Land," is found in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002): 293-304. The physicist-priest A. R. Peacocke critiques White in *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979): 275-78, as does Robin Attfield, in *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1991), 20-23. More sympathetic to White is James A. Nash, whose remarks appear in "The Ecological Complaint Against Christianity," in *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). One of the more interesting lines of argument against White are studies of non-Christian societies that show much of the same ecological blight as the West. For instance, Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan studied environmental practices in Asia and found deforestation, erosion, and urbanization to be widespread problems. And Erich Isaac has documented considerable damage on the Old World lands meted out by Arab imperialists and on central Burma by Buddhists. See David Livingstone's account of these studies in "Ecomyth #1: The Church is To Blame," *Christianity Today*, April 4, 1994: 24-27.

<sup>15</sup>Berry, "The Gift of Good Land," 294.

<sup>16</sup>White, "Continuing the Conversation," in Ian G. Barbour, ed., *Western Man and Environmental Ethics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 60.

<sup>17</sup>See the website's section entitled "Mixing Religion and Mining," at <http://www.kentuckycoal.org/index.cfm?pageToken=mtmIssues>.

<sup>18</sup>New Testament references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>19</sup>Rowland's observations are in the commentary on Revelation in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), Volume XII, 644. Metzger's ap-



pear in *The New Oxford Bible, with the Apocrypha*, Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 1509.

<sup>20</sup>In fairness to Leopold, he was perhaps closer to a biblical view than my quotation of him may suggest, as my discussion of Gatta's work on him, later in this paper, will argue. Lawrence Buell also cites Leopold's "concepts of 'biotic right' and 'ecological conscience,' which enlist scientific ecology in the service of an environmental ethics that amounts to a secularized extension of Judeo-Christian stewardship tradition, holding up the survival of individual life forms and of ecosystems as its ideal" (Religion, 235).

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in McKibben, *Comforting*, 36.

<sup>22</sup>Weinberg's remarks appear in a 1999 lecture entitled "A Designer Universe?" at the Conference on Cosmic Design, hosted by the American Association of the Advancement of Science, in Washington, DC. Weinberg concludes by denying that the universe is designed. The lecture has been reprinted with permission on the website Physics Link at [http://www.physlink.com/education/essay\\_weinberg.cfm#1](http://www.physlink.com/education/essay_weinberg.cfm#1).

<sup>23</sup>Wess, "Geocentric Ecocriticism," *New Literary History* 10.2 (Summer 2003).

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