

# Remembering Creation: Towards a Christian Ecosophy

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For Prof. Jacob Sherman, Fall 2011



*The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun* by William Blake

“The Lord was born with me [Wisdom] at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth...Then I was beside Him, as a master artist, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men.” -*Proverbs* 8:22-31

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image...so that they may rule...’ And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’...And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” -*Genesis* 1:26-31

“I say that man must be serious with the serious. God alone is worthy of supreme seriousness, but man is made God’s plaything, and that is the best part of him...What, then, is the right way of living? Life must be lived as play.”  
-Plato, *Laws*

“He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio sees himself only. Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.” -William Blake, *There Is No Natural Religion*

“The life of God and divine wisdom...can...be spoken of as love disporting with itself; but this idea falls into edification, and even sinks into insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative.” -G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

## Introduction

The epigraphs quoted at the start of this essay are meant to remind my reader of the meaning of life and the reason given for the creation of the universe by the religions of the West. God creates and maintains the universe because He delights in doing so, and our role as His most imaginative creatures is to take seriously His love of play by organizing our lives, and the life of all creation, accordingly. To be made in the image of God is not merely to be capable of thinking His plan after Him, but to be co-creator with Christ of the Kingdom, on earth, as it is in heaven.

In our secular age, when the hands of humans are reshaping the earth to their liking, it has become difficult for us to read of the ways of our ancestors without incredulity. Their prophecies of God’s gift of grace do not in any way cohere with the profiting and purchasing that constitutes our everyday labors. Their descriptions of the universe no longer make sense to the modern mind. Our eyes can no longer see, nor our hearts hear, the logic with which the ancients weaved the world.

This ignorance of the old ways has grown alongside the rise of a new kind of knowledge. Modern science continues to reorient humanity’s understanding of and relation to earth and the larger universe. Its discoveries and inventions have fundamentally altered our conception of *how* the universe evolved thus far and *how* it will evolve in the future. Left unanswered, if not also

unasked by the scientific perspective is the age old question of *why* the universe was created and *why* it continues to unfold creatively.

The ancients of Athens and Jerusalem alike perceived an eternal *Wisdom* to be at work shaping the course of the visible cosmos. They believed Her fruit was better than the choicest gold or silver.<sup>1</sup> They sought a way of life in concert with this universal intelligence responsible for creating and sustaining all temporal things. Further, they assumed that “*their portrayal of an ordered cosmos helped to create one, and their liturgies maintained it.*”<sup>2</sup>

Moderns, in contrast, have become alienated from their origin in and forgetful of their responsibility toward the Wisdom of creation. Science, in the modern age, has lost sight of Wisdom and the moral vision She provides. It has wed itself instead to the instrumentalism of market-driven technology, replacing an understanding of the names of angels<sup>3</sup> with an ever-accumulating body of specialized *knowledge* and the earthshaking *power* it makes possible. Man-made models of nature have come to obscure modern humanity’s vision of the glory of creation as the artwork of angels.

The laws of the market are opposed to the Laws of the Creator. The accumulation of wealth has come to replace Wisdom as the most important aspiration in human life. Money has become the source of all value and meaning. “No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve both God and money.”<sup>4</sup> Not the beautification and celebration of Gaia and Her creatures in the Name of God,

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<sup>1</sup> *Proverbs* 8:19

<sup>2</sup> p. 20, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker.

<sup>3</sup> “Angel lore was in effect the natural science of that time,” see p. 79, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>4</sup> *Matthew* 6:24

but the production and consumption of Her resources in the name of the dollar is now the normal, “the good,” way of life.

Modern intellectuals, taught to think according to the needs of the age, take for granted the ontological chasm separating questions of meaning and morality from those of mechanism and motion. Economics, now considered a positive science and therefore beyond the pay grade of philosophers and theologians, was once defined as the science of morality.<sup>5</sup> It stands today, rather awkwardly, at the helm of our techno-capitalist civilization. Not philosopher-priests, but capital engineers rule over the contemporary geopolitical arena. Citizens of more progressive leanings are uncertain whether economic “science” is not just the purveyor of an oppressive upper class ideology.<sup>6</sup> Ecology, similarly, is dismissed by many conservatives as a front for socialism.<sup>7</sup> Because of these widespread uncertainties, humanity’s sense of the purpose of life--*of the way we ought to live*--has become increasingly fragmented and privatized, relegated to personal opinion and banished from reasoned political discourse.

Ecology is no doubt another fundamental scientific reorientation, “a revolution in self- and cultural understanding that matches, if not exceeds, in importance the sixteenth-century Copernican astronomical revolution.”<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the influence of ecological science on

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<sup>5</sup> See James E. Alvey’s essay “A Short History of Economics as a Moral Science” (1999). As Alvey points out, even Adam Smith, the intellectual architect of capitalism, understood economics to be subject to a moral framework of virtues, namely, justice, prudence, and benevolence.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the “Occupy Wall Street” movement. More on p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the Heartland Institute: <http://www.globalwarmingheartland.org/>; “It is a painful irony that while the Heartlanders are busily calling climate change a left-wing plot, most leftists have yet to realize that climate science has handed them the most powerful argument against capitalism since William Blake’s “dark Satanic Mills” (and, of course, those mills were the beginning of climate change).” -“Capitalism vs. the Climate” by Naomi Klein in the Nov. 28th edition of *The Nation*: <http://www.thenation.com/article/164497/capitalism-vs-climate?page=0,5> (retrieved 12/9/2011).

<sup>8</sup> p. 93-94, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (2003) by Norman Wirzba

public policy has been superficial, leading only to slightly more efficient light bulbs and hybrid gas-electric automobiles. So long as ecology remains narrowly scientific in the secular sense, concerned with *how* and not *why*, it can penetrate no deeper into humanity's dysfunctional cosmopolitical orientation. "Home," in the individualized techno-capitalist context, means *my* home or *your* home; Gaia--*our home*--has receded into the neglected background of human life.

I believe the eco-social crisis of our age has its roots in the rupture between religion and science, especially the science of economics. In order to reunite the *how* with the *why*, humanity must remember its proper relation to creation and its Creator. *Ecosophy* is the fruit of such memory, the *wisdom of home* that, if only we would water it, would grow as a great tree from the soil of every earthly soul.

"The Gods of the earth and sea,  
Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree  
But their search was all in vain:  
There grows one in the Human Brain"<sup>9</sup>

Ecosophy brings economics back to its roots in moral science and theology, and enchants ecological science so as to renew humanity's connection to a living creation.

Our species has a wealth of wisdom traditions from which to draw in service of this call to remember, and those concerned to answer it have a dual responsibility: to give what they have drawn from the deep well of their own tradition *and* to receive the living waters others have likewise drawn up from theirs. We must all drink together, since Gaia has but one ocean, one climate, and one life.

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<sup>9</sup> lines 21-25, "The Human Abstract" in *Songs of Experience* (1794) by William Blake

The Christian religion is an especially important well to explore in relation to the contemporary eco-social crisis, since modern Western science and technology were born out of its cultural matrix.<sup>10</sup> Secularity, in other words, can itself be understood as an inevitable moment in the historical unfolding of Christ's incarnation.<sup>11</sup> Without historically situating modern Western civilization in the context of Christianity, secularity is all too easily misunderstood. As radical a break with the past as it may appear to be, Enlightenment secularism is evidently *not* best characterized as the rise of individual rationality above commonly held myths, *nor* as the firm grasp of scientific truths and technological powers that can replace religious delusions and magical incantations. The evidence of the inadequacy of such a triumphant characterization of modernity is legion: the isolated modern consumer is ruled over by perhaps the most deceitful and destructive myth of all, the myth of the market; Kantian philosophers have come to impose epistemic limits upon the study of reality, creating an intellectual culture of skepticism too embarrassed to authoritatively address matters of ultimate concern; and the fetishization of both money and industrial machines has so completely alienated consumers from the concrete materiality of life that such technologies now function in a way indistinguishable from black magic.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wide consensus among scholars has been reached on this point. See especially Lynn White's essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" (1967) and more recently, Donna Haraway's *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium* (1997).

<sup>11</sup> See Sean Kelly's *Coming Home: The Birth and Transformation of the Planetary Era* (2010). Kelly argues that secularity is dialectically woven into the Great Code at the core of the Christian mythos.

<sup>12</sup> Machines do not magically create growth and increase efficiency at the industrial centers *ex nihilo*, but are animated by land and labor that has been exploited on the periphery. Economics, like ecology, is a zero sum game. See p. 147 of Alf Hornborg's *The Power of the Machine: Global Inequities of Economy, Technology, and Environment* (2001).

Secular philosophy's failure to engage the market-driven metaphysics of techno-capitalism for fear of trespassing into theology has allowed the "science" of capitalist economics to upstage the Wisdom of creation. Any hope of finding orientation in these chaotic times depends upon a renaissance of the poetic science of God:

"For beyond the nostalgia for a premodern grandeur or the doomed utopias of modern reason, what is the actual work of theology--but an incantation at the edge of uncertainty?...In this gathering space, religious discourse as a spiritual and social practice offers a unique depth of history and future...At its shore, the very edge of [chaos], the ancient oscillation of religious language between assertion and negation, utterance and silence, takes on a tidal rhythm."<sup>13</sup>

It is not merely the knowledge of God that must be reborn, but the practice of His Wisdom. The human, as the *imago dei*, is tasked with the renewal and maintenance of the creation covenant. *Genesis* 1:28 calls us to "subdue" and to "dominate" that is, "to harness or to bind" heaven and earth, to "maintain the bonds of creation."<sup>14</sup>

"Dominion must always be tied to the gratitude that follows from seeing everything in its relation to God. It must share in and be patterned on the grace and delight manifest in God's creation of the universe. As our practical lives reflect gratitude back to God, we will at the same time transform the look of the creation of which we are a part."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> p. xviii, *Face of the Deep: a theology of becoming* (2003) by Catherine Keller. Keller is at the forefront of a promising new field called "theopoietics."

<sup>14</sup> p. 122, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>15</sup> p. 138, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (2003) by Norman Wirzba

As the children of Wisdom, we are called upon by our Creator to be co-creators with Her in all our deeds and all our speech.<sup>16</sup> To be made in the image of God is to be God's poet, the namer and storyteller of creation.

"The storytellers of ancient Israel knew that our attitude to the creation is shaped by the way we speak about it...Only time will show the impact on society, and on the whole creation, of [secular humanity's] refusal to use theological or even moral language. So far, the signs are not good."<sup>17</sup>

## **The Rise and Fall of the Myth of the Market**

In a recent op-ed published in the *New York Times*, Greg Mankiw, former economic adviser to George W. Bush, responded to students of his introductory economics course at Harvard after they staged a walk-out in solidarity with the "Occupy Wall Street" movement.<sup>18</sup> The students cited the increasing corporatization of their education and the conservative slant of his perspective on the economy as their reasons. "Like most economists," Mankiw responded, "I don't view the study of economics as laden with ideology." He then cites the words of John Maynard Keynes: "[Economics] is a method rather than a doctrine, an apparatus of the mind, a technique for thinking, which helps the possessor draw correct conclusions." Mankiw goes on to admit that economists don't "understand everything" and "still have much to learn," as is evidenced by the recent financial crisis. The implication of his response is clear: the financial

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<sup>16</sup> p. 210, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>17</sup> p. 21, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/business/know-what-youre-protesting-economic-view.html?sq=harvard%20economics&st=cse&adxnnl=1&scp=1&adxnnlx=1323047019-jVyFPOfBldOYAlgzNU3NQ> (retrieved 12/4/2011)



crisis was not caused by the inherent immorality of the market; rather, it was caused by a technical oversight that can only be solved using the scientific method. No soul-searching required.

It is no surprise that modern day economists fail to recognize their own ideology at work; as Marx suggested, “*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*”--“They do not know it, but they are doing it.”<sup>19</sup> The goodness of the market is always assumed; its technocrats merely crunch the correct numbers designed to keep the monetary machine running smoothly. Unfortunately, the more efficient the machine becomes, the more quickly the planet and her people are ravaged. Gaia groans in bondage, waiting for the Logos to remember His Name and save Her from the logic of the beast.<sup>20</sup> Lacking the eternal vision of Wisdom, the human heart remains vulnerable to the secular myth of the market, now the most formidable rival of traditional religions.<sup>21</sup>

Following the financial crisis of 2008, the thought of Ayn Rand, perhaps the world’s most popular purveyor of the myth of the market, saw something of a resurgence. Sales of her novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) went through the roof as American business leaders struggled to hang on to their dream.<sup>22</sup> The dystopian story’s mysterious protagonist, John Galt, along with other captains of American industry, decide to go on strike to protest government regulation, bringing the country to a standstill. The core of the novel is Galt’s 70-page speech, wherein Rand’s entire philosophy is laid out. In it, she denounces the Christian morality of love of one’s neighbor,

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<sup>19</sup> From *Capital*, quoted on p. 28, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) by Slavoj Zizek

<sup>20</sup> See Revelation 13

<sup>21</sup> See p. 55, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>22</sup> [http://articles.cnn.com/2009-04-27/entertainment/ayn.rand.atlas.shrugged\\_1\\_john-galt-ayn-rand-institute-atlas?\\_s=PM:SHOWBIZ](http://articles.cnn.com/2009-04-27/entertainment/ayn.rand.atlas.shrugged_1_john-galt-ayn-rand-institute-atlas?_s=PM:SHOWBIZ) (retrieved 12/2/2011). To date, nearly 30 million copies of her books have been sold.

calling it a “morality of sacrifice,” while championing a “morality of life” based upon egoism and the sovereignty of the individual rational mind over the human community and the raw materials of nature.

“We will open the gates of our city to those who deserve to enter,” she has Galt say,

“a city of smokestacks, pipe lines, orchards, markets and inviolate homes. With the sign of the dollar as our symbol, the sign of free trade and free minds, we will move to reclaim this country once more from the impotent savages who never discovered its nature, its meaning, its splendor.”<sup>23</sup>

It would be difficult to come closer to John’s vision of Babylon in the book of *Revelation*, where all wear the mark of the beast.<sup>24</sup>

Former chair of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, who joined Rand’s circle in the early fifties, helped her do research for *Atlas Shrugged*.<sup>25</sup> In early 2010, Greenspan was asked if the financial crisis signaled an indictment of Rand’s free-market ideology. His answer is instructive:

“Not at all...There is no alternative [to competitive markets] if you want to have economic growth and higher standards of living in a democratic society...If you merely look at history since the Enlightenment...when all of those ideas surfaced and became applicable in public policy, we’ve had an explosion of economic growth, especially in developing countries, where hundreds of millions of people have been pulled out of extreme poverty and starvation...”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> p. 957, *Atlas Shrugged* (2005)

<sup>24</sup> See *Revelation* 18

<sup>25</sup> p. 6, *Alan Greenspan: the oracle behind the curtain* (2006) by E. Ray Canterbury

<sup>26</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/interview-alan-greenspan-10281612> (~7:00 mins, retrieved on 12/2/2011)

No one can deny the good that came of the political and economic transformations of the Enlightenment, but in the decisive shift from a society ordered by the revealed authority of God to one remade by the rational autonomy of man, much has been bent out of proportion. Greenspan and Rand are of course right about the explosion of economic growth resulting from global capitalism, but they appear blind to the eco-social costs of this growth, past and present. I could spend the rest of this essay listing present market-generated global injustices, but for the sake of space, I will list only a few telling examples: half of the world's 2.2 billion children currently live in poverty,<sup>27</sup> almost a billion people lack access to safe water supplies,<sup>28</sup> about 25 million acres of crop land are lost every year due to soil erosion,<sup>29</sup> and 50% of the world's non-human species may be extinct by 2100.<sup>30</sup> "They have rejected the law of the Lord [and] have been led astray by false gods...They sell the innocent for silver...They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground."<sup>31</sup>

Further, global climate change resulting from "free market" industrial capitalism is threatening to make all these injustices far worse, in addition to other consequences. As Naomi Klein argued in her own recent op-ed in *The Nation*, "responding to the climate threat requires strong government action at all levels," which is exactly what "free market" ideologues find so appalling. Such action is necessary for any globally coordinated transition into a more eco-socially sustainable economy, where "justice [rolls] down like the waters."<sup>32</sup> However,

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> (retrieved 12/2/2011)

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/monitoring/jmp\\_report\\_7\\_10\\_lores.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp_report_7_10_lores.pdf) (retrieved 12/5/2011)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/feb/14/science.environment> (retrieved 12/5/2011)

<sup>30</sup> See *The Future of Life* (2002) by E.O. Wilson

<sup>31</sup> *Amos* 2:4-7

<sup>32</sup> *Amos* 5:24

government takeover of industry is not the desired goal, but the initiation of “a new civilizational paradigm” grounded in a “respect for natural cycles of renewal.”

Klein continues:

“Real climate solutions are ones that steer [government] interventions to systematically disperse and devolve power and control to the community level, whether through community-controlled renewable energy, local organic agriculture or transit systems genuinely accountable to their users.”<sup>33</sup>

As for past injustices, Rand’s celebration of the genocide of the native population (“impotent savages”) that once called Turtle Island home is a telling reminder that capitalism has always been wed to colonialism. In order to achieve perpetual growth, capitalist markets had to continually expand into untapped territories, there exploiting the labor and land of conquered peoples to turn a profit back at home. From Rand’s perspective, such exploitation was perfectly justified, since indigenous populations are not made up of free individuals, having no concept of rights or property ownership.<sup>34</sup> Nor does Gaia or any of Her non-human creatures deserve the respect of properly rational individuals, since, following Lockean theories of property ownership, their value is inferior until produced for consumption in the human marketplace.<sup>35</sup> The myth of

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<sup>33</sup> “Capitalism vs. the Climate” by Naomi Klein in the Nov. 28th edition of *The Nation*: <http://www.thenation.com/article/164497/capitalism-vs-climate?page=0,5> (retrieved 12/9/2011).

<sup>34</sup> See p. 102-104, *Ayn Rand Answers* (2005).

<sup>35</sup> “The ‘labor’ of his body and the ‘work’ of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.” - “The Second Treatise on Civil Government” (1690) by John Locke

the market reigns. “Alas, alas, thou great city...for thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery.”<sup>36</sup>

Another myth, that of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, teaches us that humans “have been created with free will, but not with freedom.”<sup>37</sup> Adam was deceived by Satan, being promised the total freedom of secular knowledge and power over the earth when all that could be delivered is shame, guilt, and death. Similarly, Rand’s is no morality of life, but of death, since it lacks the Wisdom of a higher authority, of the Creator of all things. “Adam was created with free will--it was possible to choose the forbidden tree; but Adam was not created free, he did not create the system within which he exercised his free will.”<sup>38</sup> The freedom of human beings is in our capacity to love and to serve, to do the work of Christ whose life is eternal. Any other freedom humans attempt to steal comes at the cost of death, since the rules of creation are not designed by human desires.<sup>39</sup>

These are two competing visions, that of the life of the market versus that of the miracle of life. The life of the market is that of ruthless competition, the struggle for existence between selfish animals, who come from dust and to dust return.<sup>40</sup> The miracle of life is that of spiritual communion, the joy of co-creation amongst loving angels. The former is a morality rooted in the

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<sup>36</sup> *Revelation* 18:23

<sup>37</sup> p. 230, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>38</sup> p. 230, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>39</sup> In secular terms, the mathematical laws governing ecological energy exchange cannot be remade by even the most powerful technologies.

<sup>40</sup> *Genesis* 3:19

shallow pleasures of private accumulation, while the latter calls humanity to participate with Christ in the renewal of all creation.

The miracle of life can be understood through an ecosophic perception of the sacramentality of creation. Consider Gaia's relationship to the Sun, that most generous of celestial beings. The Sun sacrifices its own body to give away vast quantities of energy to Gaia without any expectation of return.

“Men were conscious of this long before astrophysics measured that ceaseless prodigality; they saw it ripen the harvests and they associated its splendor with the act of someone who gives without receiving.”<sup>41</sup>

Not a single quantum of energy could be transacted between living beings upon the surface of earth without the Sun's primordial generosity. This is as true of the monetary transactions of the human economy as it is of the ecological transactions of soil and plants. Life is a gift, not an earning, a celebration of divine surplus, not a competition amidst material scarcity.

Contrary to Rand's racist ideology, the native populations of pre-conquest America understood the meaning of the Sun's splendor deeply enough to ritually organize their lives on earth to reflect the same patterns it was performing in heaven. Extravagant potlatch celebrations were held in honor of births, weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage. Natives would gather together for great feasts gifted by wealthy families, and to sing and dance in honor of their divine ancestors. These ceremonies provide evidence that not barter, as classical economists assume, but *gifting* was the earliest form of exchange.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> p. 28-29, *The Accursed Share* (1967) by Georges Bataille

<sup>42</sup> See p. 67, *The Accursed Share* (1967) by Georges Bataille

Potlatch celebrations were outlawed by both Canadian and US governments in the late 19th century, and remained so until 1951. Christianity's influence upon such legislation is complex. Protestant missionaries like William Duncan wrote in 1875 of the celebrations that they were "by far the most formidable of all obstacles in the way of Indians becoming Christians, or even civilized."<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, by the 1950s, many churches openly integrated potlatch into their liturgies.<sup>44</sup>

Max Weber's analysis of the complicity of Protestantism in the rise of capitalist economies is well known.<sup>45</sup>

"Weber deserves credit for having rigorously analyzed the connection between a religious crisis and the economic turnover that gave rise to the modern world...It seems that there is an affinity between the frame of mind of a hard-working, profit-calculating industrialist and the prosaic severity of the reformed religion."<sup>46</sup>

Not only does potlatch present a challenge to standard histories of economics, much like Weber's analysis of Protestantism, it "enables one to perceive a connection between religious behaviors and economic ones."<sup>47</sup> By emphasizing humanity's nearly irredeemable fallenness and God's incomprehensible transcendence, Protestant theologies succeeded in separating the physical/economic sphere of *works* from the spiritual/religious sphere of *grace*. This meant that one could not hope to find God's favor through outward deeds like gifting, since salvation was

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<sup>43</sup> p. 207, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890* (1977) by Robin Fischer Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press

<sup>44</sup> p. 78, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: the Indian Land Question in British Colombia, 1849-1989* (1990) by Paul Tennant

<sup>45</sup> See *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905)

<sup>46</sup> p. 114-115, *The Accursed Share* (1967) by Georges Bataille

<sup>47</sup> p. 68, *The Accursed Share* (1967) by Georges Bataille

won through inward faith alone. This was, no doubt, an important critique of the Catholic Church's pompous hypocrisy,<sup>48</sup> but as with many of the Enlightenment's later reforms, the Reformation ended up distorting the West's moral and ontological bonds with creation as much as it may have advanced it spiritually (through intensified inwardness of faith) and epistemologically (through rational criticism of received belief).

As modernity unfolded, traditional sacraments were increasingly considered to be culturally constructed symbolic performances, rather than theurgic events opening an economy between creature and Creator.<sup>49</sup> Skepticism of inherited norms and revealed truths steadily increased as individuals turned to their own reason and values for guidance concerning ultimate matters. Weber famously argued that it was the downplaying of communal ritual among the Protestant laity that first made possible the disenchantment of the world, the formation of the private modern subject, and the subsequent rise of techno-scientific capitalism. God, even if not quite dead, had all but fled the realms of space and time. Free of the sacred places and liturgical calendars of traditional sacramental religion, the modern individual no longer mirrored the celestial economy of angels, but remade the earth in his own fallen image.

"It can doubtless be said of the Protestant critique of *saintly works* that it gave the world over to *profane works*, that the demand for divine purity only managed to exile the divine, and to complete man's separation from it. It can be said, finally,

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<sup>48</sup> "Catholic theologians enjoy dwelling in scholastic juridical arguments about how Christ paid the price for our sins, etc.--no wonder that Luther reacted to the lowest outcome of this logic, the reduction of redemption to something that can be bought from the Church." -"Only a Suffering God Can Save Us" by Slavoj Žižek (<http://www.lacan.com/zizshadowplay.html> [retrieved 12/9/2011])

<sup>49</sup> I would add that the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* forbid any poetic interpretations of or apocryphal additions to Biblical scripture, thereby marginalizing the creative role of humans as God's earthly imagineers.



that starting then *things* dominated man, insofar as he lived for enterprise and less and less in the present time.”<sup>50</sup>

Potlatch was practiced by native communities as a form of ritual participation in the divine effulgence of creation. Sharing in Gaia’s bounty, they lived like the Sun, for glory rather than for greed. Protestant capitalists found the practice wasteful, and sought to eliminate such rituals from the American continent because they were based upon the impure mixing of the Great Economy of God with the profane economy of the market. The Great Economy is “reflected in God’s Sabbath delight, a celebration of all life, an affirmation of the right of all to be and to thrive.”<sup>51</sup> The profane economy of the market, on the other hand, reflects the sinful nature of an alienated humanity, more interested in its own shortsighted pursuits than the flourishing of all creation. The Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment are not here being *blamed* for the eco-social crisis; rather, they are being read as moments in the historical dialectic of Christ’s incarnation. They are birth contractions, the divine labour pains that Hegel refers to in the epigraph above, insisting upon the necessity of the negative to avoid a shallow conception of salvation.

Reintroducing theologically grounded and ecologically sensitive morality into the norms of the marketplace will require an initially *painful* reorientation of modern human life, the crucifixion of the old to make way for the new.<sup>52</sup> In order to come into alignment with the Wisdom of creation so as to participate in God’s ongoing artistry, everything from our scientific

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<sup>50</sup> p. 133, *The Accursed Share* (1967) by Georges Bataille

<sup>51</sup> p. 163, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (2003) by Norman Wirzba

<sup>52</sup> James Lovelock coined the apt phrase to characterize the needs of our moment: “sustainable retreat.” See *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back--And How We Can Still Save Humanity* (2006)

understanding of life and energy to the time-anxiety underlying our socio-economic commitment to work must be reimagined.

## **Imagining the Great Economy**

Ritual practices like potlatch break down the dichotomy that normally exists between work and play. The Jubilee year and Sabbath commandment provide Biblical parallels to potlatch. On the 7th day of creation, God rested.<sup>53</sup> Our human “holy days” call us to rebalance creation by making time for rest and re-creation.<sup>54</sup> In Jesus’ time, Genesis was understood as the pattern of world history: the 6th day was considered the human age, the time when Adam is called to work with the Wisdom of the Creator to bring about the completion of the creation, so that all may rest on the 7th day. The completion of creation on the 7th day is the coming of the Kingdom<sup>55</sup> wherein God becomes “all in all,”<sup>56</sup> bound up in relational joy with creation.<sup>57</sup>

In order to imagine, and to co-create, the Great Economy of the Kingdom, it is first necessary to free ourselves from the anxieties of the world of working. Anxiety makes the problems of the market apparent to us, but uncovering their solution requires that we release ourselves from its world-distorting grip.<sup>58</sup> Unlike the anti-religion of the market ruling over the world of working, wherein “time is money” as Ben Franklin famously quipped, the religion of Jesus calls us to

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<sup>53</sup> *Genesis* 2:2, “On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.”

<sup>54</sup> See p. 58, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>55</sup> See p. 182, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

<sup>56</sup> *1 Corinthians* 15:28

<sup>57</sup> See p. 245, “God at the Crossroads: A Postcolonial Reading of Sophia” by Mayra Rivera in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (2006), ed. by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah

<sup>58</sup> See p. 14, *The Accursed Share* (1967) by Georges Bataille

observe the birds of the air and the lilies of the field living without toil: “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?”<sup>59</sup>

Play, like the perception of Wisdom, opens up a non-ordinary reality, allowing us to transcend the everyday world of work. The idea is not to transcend work entirely, but to recognize its relativity in regard to all the other experiential realities that are engaged with during a full 24-hour cycle of earth's rotation (sleep, dreams, etc.), or the full span of a mortal life (birth, love, near death, death, spiritual vision, etc.). Work will always be necessary for survival, but the question remains: *why* survive? If not *to play*, then *for what*?

Ritual performance, and the creative efflorescence it encourages, is at the existential core of our lives, and indeed is the beating heart at the center of creation.

“We might sometimes reflect and recall that the purpose of all our science, technology, industry, manufacturing, commerce, and finance is celebration, planetary celebration. That is what moves the stars through the heavens and the earth through its seasons. The final norm of judgment concerning the success or failure of our technologies is the extent to which they enable us to participate more fully in this grand festival.”<sup>60</sup>

The meaning of the world and the order of the cosmos must be enacted, or *imaginally bodied forth*. The human imagination, the Seal of creation, does not receive the world's meaning ready-made, but must participate in its making: “The creature of earth and heaven [upholds] within his own being the bond that [joins] the material world to its source of life.”<sup>61</sup> The meaning of earthly

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<sup>59</sup> *Matthew* 6:26-28

<sup>60</sup> p. 69, *The Dream of the Earth* (1988) by Thomas Berry

<sup>61</sup> p. 230, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (2010) by Margaret Barker

life soon dissolves unless we are willing to *play*, to make imaginably present what would *not* otherwise be so. *Imagination* is the soul's temple, the holy of holies within which immanence and transcendence meet and give birth to worlds worth living in. In this way, everyday is made holy, and all our work becomes a form of worship.<sup>62</sup> Religion, science, art, and indeed, culture in general, are all born out of playfulness.<sup>63</sup> Humans may not be the only creatures who play, but surely only we take play *seriously*.

Contrary to this vision of creation rooted in play, biologists since Darwin have tended to understand evolution primarily as a competitive “struggle for existence” amidst scarcity, where only the fittest survive. More recently, the work of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis has entirely transformed Darwin's picture of the biosphere, a picture that perhaps reflects the economic conditions holding sway in 19th century England more so than the natural conditions of earthly life.<sup>64</sup> Lovelock's Gaia theory has shown that life is necessarily a planetary affair, constituted by a massively interconnected web of biotic and abiotic feedback loops.<sup>65</sup> Margulis' research on the bacterial basis of all life and her theory of the origin of species via symbiogenesis reveal that lateral gene transfer (*gene gifting*) and cooperative symbiosis are the primary engine of evolution.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See p. 171-174, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (2003) by Norman Wirzba

<sup>63</sup> See *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011) by Robert N. Bellah

<sup>64</sup> p. 418, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (1962) by G. Himmelfarb: “...natural selection arose...in England because it was a perfect expression of Victorian ‘greed-philosophy,’ of the capitalist ethic and Manchester economics.”

<sup>65</sup> See *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Earth* (1988) by James Lovelock

<sup>66</sup> See *The Symbiotic Planet* (1999) by Lynn Margulis

Another 19th century science, thermodynamics, was developed to increase the efficiency of industrial machinery. It defined energy as the ability to do *work*,<sup>67</sup> a socio-economic concept. A few decades earlier, William Blake wrote of his eternal vision--“Past, Present & Future, existing all at once”--of industrializing Europe:

“And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire

Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. black the cloth

In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works

Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic

Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which

Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace.”<sup>68</sup>

Blake’s phrase, “cogs tyrannic/Moving by compulsion each other,” perfectly sums up the picture provided by mechanistic science of creation, the same picture underlying technocapitalist industrialism. From Blake’s poetic perspective, energy is not compulsive work, but “Eternal Delight.”<sup>69</sup> Nor is God’s ongoing creative artistry tyrannic or compulsive, but *persuasive*:

“The action of God is its *relation--by feeling and so being felt*, the divine invites

the *becoming* of the other; by feeling the becoming of the other, *the divine itself*

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<sup>67</sup> “Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire” (1824) by Sadi Carnot

<sup>68</sup> plate 15, line 15, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804)

<sup>69</sup> plate 4, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793)

*becomes...[affirming] an oscillation between divine attraction and divine reception, invitation and sabbath...*<sup>70</sup>

This is a perspective contrary to the logic of *creatio ex nihilo*, be it God's creation by fiat of the cosmos out of chaos, or humanity's of property out of the purposeless matter of earth. *Genesis'* acts of creation must be read in concert with the wisdom of *Proverbs* and the passion of the *Gospels*. God did not create the world out of nothing, but beget it and suffered it with Wisdom.<sup>71</sup>

Modern techno-capitalism, rooted in a disenchanted science, has made humanity forgetful of the Names of the angelic powers animating the cosmos. Lacking such an ecosophic perception of the true nature of reality has left modern humanity ignorant of *why* Gaia is the way She is: "ever hearing, but never understanding...ever seeing, but never perceiving."<sup>72</sup> This ignorance hardly stopped us from learning *how* many of Her seemingly isolated parts worked, and how we might manipulate them for our own profit. Cunning power became our knowledge, following Kant's maxim: "*He who would know the world must first manufacture it.*"<sup>73</sup> Isaiah perceived the result in the Israel of his day: "Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands."<sup>74</sup> Jeremiah, as well: "They burned incense to other gods and worshipped the works of their hands."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> p. 198, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (2003) by Catherine Keller (summarizing Alfred North Whitehead's dipolar divinity).

<sup>71</sup> *Proverbs* 8:22

<sup>72</sup> *Isaiah* 6:9

<sup>73</sup> p. 240, *Opus Postumum* (1993); "Manufacture" from the Latin *manus* meaning "hand."

<sup>74</sup> *Isaiah* 2:8

<sup>75</sup> *Jeremiah* 1:16; Compare with the words of a 19th century business man "Smoke is the incense burning on the altars of industry. It is beautiful to me. It shows that men are changing the merely potential forces of nature into articles of comfort for humanity." -W. P. Rend, quoted on p. 385 in "Businessmen against pollution in 19th century Chicago," by C. M. Rosen, *Business History Review* 69 (1995)

The Great Economy of the Kingdom “is in our midst,” as Jesus said.<sup>76</sup> Wisdom, too, is all around: “He who has ears, let him hear.”<sup>77</sup> If the heart be reached, not through reason, but through imagination,<sup>78</sup> then healing humanity’s eco-social wound must begin there. Enlightenment conceptions of the “state of nature” must be entirely re-envisioned, such that Gaia’s values become the soil out of which the human soul imagines its own. Without resurrecting the imagination--“the divine body of the Lord Jesus, blessed forever”<sup>79</sup>--our senses will remain dulled<sup>80</sup> to the power of angels wisely weaving the world together in God’s Name.

“Blessed be the praise of Your Name and the song of Your strength and Your remembrance in eternity and forever. In the praise of Your Name is revealed the secret of Wisdom and in the song of Your remembrance are disclosed the mysteries of mysteries and the gates of understanding, so that the creatures of heaven and earth acknowledge before You: Blessed be You, Lord, wise of the mysteries and ruler of all that is concealed.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Luke 17:21*

<sup>77</sup> *Matthew 11:15*

<sup>78</sup> p. 89, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Ascent* by J. H. Newman (1870)

<sup>79</sup> plate 5, line 59, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804) by William Blake

<sup>80</sup> *2 Corinthians 3:14*

<sup>81</sup> section 676, *Hekhalot Rabbati*; quoted on p. 98 of *The Hidden and Manifest God* (1992) by Paul Shafer