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FORMATION OF AN ECOLOGICAL CONSCIENCE: A CHRISTIAN IMPERATIVE

Amidst ongoing ecological crises, the global community has recognized the critical importance of addressing ecological issues and forging a sustainable connection with the environment. As humanity grapples with the profound consequences of environmental degradation and climate change, various philosophical, ethical, and spiritual perspectives have emerged to guide our collective response. A key aspect of this endeavor is the development of an ecological conscience within each individual. This essay explores the Christian tradition, particularly within the Catholic Church, as a valuable source for shaping and nurturing an ecological conscience. Drawing on scriptural and magisterial sources, it delves into the concepts of ecological conversion, ecological conscience, and ecological consciousness, emphasizing the need for a transformative shift in attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. By nurturing an ecological conscience and integrating spiritual practices with environmental stewardship, Christian disciples contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and just world. This essay calls for a reimagining of Christian spiritual sources and practices to align them with ecological concerns, enabling a purposeful formation and nurturing of an ecological conscience.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global community has witnessed a growing recognition of the urgent need to address ecological challenges and foster a sustainable relationship with the natural world. As humanity grapples with the profound implications of environmental degradation and climate change, various philosophical, ethical, and spiritual perspectives have emerged to guide our collective response. Among these,

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the Christian tradition, particularly within the Catholic Church, offers valuable insights and a call to action that resonates with believers and non-believers alike, urging us to care for the Earth, our common home.

This essay endeavors to explore the imperative to care for creation through the interrelated notions of ecological conversion, ecological conscience, ecological consciousness, and the nurturing of an ecological conscience. Drawing upon Catholic scriptural and magisterial sources, this essay seeks to elucidate the unique Christian perspective on environmental stewardship and its profound relevance for contemporary ecological challenges.

Ecological conversion, at its core, involves a transformative change in human attitudes, values, and behaviors towards the natural world. It entails a shift from an exploitative and consumptive mindset to one that embraces the interconnectedness and sacredness of all creation, demonstrating our responsibility to care for our common home. This conversion calls for an integrated approach that encompasses ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions, recognizing the intrinsic value of every living being and the need for just and sustainable practices. Central to the concept of ecological conversion is the development of an ecological conscience—a moral compass that guides individuals and communities to act in ways that promote ecological integrity and justice. Thus, the formation and nurturing of this ecological conscience is imperative in fostering a deep sense of responsibility towards the environment and our shared home. By forming and nurturing our ecological conscience, we can foster a genuine care for creation, working towards the preservation and revitalization of our common home. By exploring the concepts of ecological conversion, ecological conscience, ecological consciousness, and the nourishment thereof, I hope to inspire meaningful dialogue and action towards a more sustainable and just world.

2. Ecological Conversion

Christian discipleship in the context of environmental concerns calls for an ecological conversion that has so often been voiced by leaders of the Church. The term “ecological conversion” was first used by Pope John Paul II in a speech in a General Audience in 2001 in which he addressed the topic of care for creation.¹ In his speech, he

¹ Pope John Paul II, General Audience Speech, January 17, 2001, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117.pdf [all internet references were accessed last on June 29, 2023].

emphasized the importance of ecological conversion as a response to the environmental crisis. He argued that ecological conversion involved a fundamental change in our attitudes and behaviors towards the natural world, and called on individuals, communities, and governments to work together to promote a more sustainable and just future for all. However, the Pope asserted that ecological conversion was not only about “a ‘physical’ ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of the various living beings, but also a ‘human’ ecology which makes the existence of creatures more dignified, by protecting the fundamental good of life in all its manifestations and by preparing for future generations an environment more in conformity with the Creator’s plan.” Undergoing an ecological conversion, therefore, is to see that in the “rediscovered harmony with nature and with one another, men and women are once again walking in the garden of creation, seeking to make the goods of the earth available to all and not just to a privileged few.”²

In the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI echoed the wisdom of his predecessor, John Paul II, recognizing the necessity of a comprehensive ecological conversion that must be anchored in “human ecology.”³ The Pontiff emphasized the interconnectedness of environmental and social concerns and called for a radical transformation of our mindset, compelling us to embrace a lifestyle that prizes truth, beauty, goodness, and communion with others. Benedict XVI asserted that the disregard for solidarity and civic friendship not only harms society but also poses a grave threat to the environment. Conversely, the degradation of the environment has an adverse impact on social relations. The Church bears a responsibility for safeguarding both humanity and creation from self-destruction.

Pope Benedict XVI also argued for the development of a human ecology that fosters a deep reverence for the natural world and recognizes the intrinsic worth of every human being.⁴ Mere economic incentives, education, and laws cannot sufficiently protect nature; instead, society’s moral orientation must be transformed. Benedict XVI reminded us that the book of nature is not merely about the environment but also encompasses life, sexuality, marriage, family, social relations, and integral human development. He emphasized the need to fulfill our duties towards the environment and the human person, avoiding the dangerous contradiction that degrades the person, disrupts the

² Ibid.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 51. – All papal documents are quoted from the digital version at the www.vatican.va websites.

⁴ Ibid.

environment, and ultimately damages society. Therefore, ecological conversion is an essential part of a more profound human conversion to humanity and to creation.

The call for a true and holistic conversion was again taken up by Pope Francis who called for an “interior conversion.”⁵ Referring to good, committed, and prayerful Christians who eschew any talk about environmental concerns, Francis remarked, “So what they all need is an ‘ecological conversion,’ whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”⁶ It is unfortunate when we see ourselves so compartmentalized that we do not recognize the inherent interconnectedness between our own well-being and that of others or of creation.

An ecological conversion, however, is not an individualistic endeavor removed from communal efforts. According to Pope Francis, individual self-improvement is not enough to address the complex problems facing our world today. Social problems must be addressed by community networks, not simply by individual good deeds. This requires a different attitude towards the world and a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is a community conversion that calls for a number of attitudes, including gratitude and recognition that the world is God’s gift. We are called to imitate God’s generosity in self-sacrifice and good works, and to be aware that we are not disconnected from other creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion. By developing our God-given capacities, we can inspire greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems. Various convictions of faith can help us enrich the meaning of this conversion, including the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us. Christ has taken unto himself this material world and is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light. God created the world with an order and dynamism that humans have no right to ignore. By recognizing and living fully this dimension of our conversion, all Christians can help nurture a sublime fraternity with all creation, embodying the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi.⁷ Thus for Pope Francis, ecological conversion

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* 217.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 217-221.

is imperative to developing an integral ecology that considers the well-being of all dimensions of life.

3. *Ecological Conscience*

If you were to ask Catholics gathered at a parish retreat, youth camp, or meeting of seminarians or religious whether they have ever confessed to committing ecological sins, chances are you would receive an overwhelming “No.” This lack of awareness is surprising, given that the Church has long recognized the concept of ecological sins. The Catholic Church is not alone. The “Green Patriarch” Bartholomew I, leader of the Orthodox Church, has been especially vocal in identifying abuses of the environment as ecological sins. When Bartholomew, who represents 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide, made this assertion to 800 participants of a symposium on religion, science, and the environment at St. Barbara’s Greek Orthodox Church in 1997, it was thought to be the first instance where a prominent religious figure had directly connected ecological issues with immoral conduct. Paul Gorman, one of the participants at the conference, reacted to Bartholomew’s words by remarking that his pronouncement presented “a whole new level of theological inquiry into the cause, and depth and dimension of human responsibility by lifting up that word—sin.”⁸

Indeed, Bartholomew’s declaration has proven to be one of the most significant and influential religious proclamations of our era. This pronouncement has been quoted and echoed numerous times across traditions. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis cited these very words of Bartholomew as concurrence to this thought.⁹ On the occasion of commemorating the 50th Earth Day in 2020, Pope Francis lamented, “We have failed to care for the earth, our garden-home; we have failed to care for our brothers and sisters. We have sinned against the earth, against our neighbours, and ultimately against the Creator, the benevolent Father who provides for everyone, and desires us to live in communion and flourish together.”¹⁰

⁸ Larry B. Stammer, “Harming the Environment is Sinful, Prelate Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1997, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-nov-09-mn-51974-story.html>.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* 8.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, General Audience Address, April 22, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200422_udienza-generale.pdf.

Taking a cue from the two Church leaders, the bishops of Amazon also addressed the issue of ecological sin in their final synod document. It states:

We propose to define ecological sin as an action or omission against God, against one's neighbour, the community and the environment. It is sin against future generations, and it is committed in acts and habits of pollution and destruction of the harmony of the environment. These are transgressions against the principles of interdependence, and they destroy networks of solidarity among creatures (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 340-344) and violate the virtue of justice.¹¹

In order for an ecological conversion to take place in which we recognize our ecological sins and desire to turn away from those sins, there needs to be formation of an ecological conscience. While the term "ecological sin" is a more recent thought, the concept of an "ecological conscience" preceded the former by many decades. In the 1940s, in his book *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold had already called for the development of an ecological conscience with regard to land ethic.¹² The call for an ecological conscience was a recurrent theme in Leopold's writings and advocacy. According to Leopold, an ecological conscience arises out of consideration of our relationship with the environment beyond that of individuals and society. He remarked:

The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals; the Mosaic Decalogue is an example. Later accretions dealt with the relation between the individual and society. The Golden Rule tries to integrate the individual to society; democracy to integrate social organization to the individual. There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations. The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is the third step in a sequence. The first two

¹¹ Pan-Amazon Synod. Final Document. The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology, 2019, 82. <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/final-document-of-the-amazon-synod.html>.

¹² Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, London: Oxford University Press 1949.

have already been taken. Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation.¹³

Nearly a century has passed since the introduction of the concept of ecological conscience by Leopold. And yet, as we stand on the precipice of a new age, there is still much work to be done in promoting this crucial ethos. It is religion, perhaps more than any other institution, that must lead the charge. For the Christian, ecological conscience is born of a deep reverence for the interconnectedness of all life and the divine spark that runs through everything. It is a recognition that our planet and its bounty are a sacred gift, bestowed upon us by the divine, to be cherished and safeguarded. It is an awareness that every action we take has a ripple effect, not just on our immediate surroundings, but on the entire world and every creature that calls it home. This ecological conscience tugs at our heart when we witness the destruction of ecosystems, the extinction of species, and the degradation of natural resources. It gives us a pang of guilt when we realize that our actions, even the seemingly small ones, contribute to the harm and exploitation of the environment. For instance, we may feel the weight of our ecological conscience when we see images of oil spills devastating marine life, or when we hear about deforestation causing loss of habitat for countless species. We may also feel a sense of responsibility when we use single-use plastics or waste food, knowing that these actions contribute to larger environmental problems. We start asking ourselves questions such as: Do I really need a straw to drink out of a Coke can or a bottle of water? Do I really need to consume food that has been shipped from the other side of the world? Do I really need to add another sweater to my already stuffed closet of jackets and sweaters? Do I really need to drive a car or a motorbike to make a 1 km trip to the store instead of riding a bike or walking?

An ecological conscience is rooted in the belief that all of creation, including the environment and its creatures, are part of God's divine plan and deserving of respect and care. It involves a commitment to uphold the principles of justice and compassion for all, including the environment, recognizing that environmental degradation and climate change disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. An ecological conscience demands that we incorporate our actions towards creation into our examen exercise each night before we go to bed, and

¹³ Ibid. See <https://www.aldoleopold.org/post/understanding-land-ethic/>.

each time we prepare to enter the confessional just as we do with other aspects of our relational life. Some pertinent questions for this examination of conscience may include:

- Have I centered my life around the overflowing love of God, which is made manifest through Jesus and the splendor of the natural world?
- Do I express gratitude and offer thanks for the abundant and wondrous gifts of creation that God has bestowed upon me?
- Do I pray for the mending of the rift between humanity and the environment, seeking forgiveness for the harm I have caused?
- Have I utilized my unique talents and skills to protect and revere the delicate and interdependent tapestry of life, securing its conservation for future generations?
- Have my behaviors contributed to the deterioration of other creatures' habitats due to mindless consumption or wastefulness?
- Do I endeavor to eradicate all barriers that impede the growth and optimal development of all living beings, as intended by their Creator, such as pollution, excess, disease, warfare, extinction, and oppressive institutions?
- Have I inspired others to acknowledge the crucial significance of cherishing the natural world and its inhabitants?

In the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020, FT) Pope Francis reiterated the idea that “among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles” (FT 275). What is born out of this situation is “a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference” (FT 30) towards the pain of fellow human beings and of creation. Those who need our care and attention either do not exist or their problems are beyond the scope of our interest (FT 73). Developing an ecological conscience in the context of care for creation resists this negative proclivity that is increasingly becoming the norm in our contemporary world.

4. *Being Ecologically Conscious*

In order for Christians to form an ecological conscience, the Church must make use of all of its resources—the Scriptures, the Magisterium, and the Traditions—through the means of catechism, Bible studies, parish retreats, liturgies, homilies, pastoral communication, etc. to inspire and lead Christians to a “conversion to what is true and to what is good.”¹⁴ Only through a well-formed ecological conscience can we become ecologically conscious individuals, communities, and Church. Jame Schaeffer, in examining *Laudato Si'*, has highlighted multiple characteristics of an ecologically conscious person.¹⁵

Ecologically conscious individuals possess a unique perspective towards the natural world, viewing all creatures as interconnected and interdependent. This perspective is grounded in a deep sense of awe and wonder towards the beauty and complexity of the Earth, which drives their desire to learn more about the natural world and its interconnectedness. They realize the benefits of contemplating each creature for its meaning within God’s plan, including discovering teachings from God and seeing ourselves in relation to all other creatures. For those with faith, this sense of awe and wonder is further deepened by the belief that all creatures are manifestations of God’s presence, and that each creature reflects a part of God’s wisdom and goodness. They see the natural world as a book that reveals God’s character and view the many diverse creatures in the universe as a source of wonder and awe.

In addition to their spiritual beliefs, ecologically conscious individuals are also open to scientific understandings of the natural world. They recognize the importance of discovering scientific knowledge about environmental problems, in order to make informed decisions about how to function within the shared home of humans and other species on Earth. This openness to scientific knowledge leads to greater creativity and enthusiasm in the ways to address the challenges facing the planet.

Ecologically conscious individuals have a spiritual disposition in their relationship with God and the earth. They recognize that the planet is a gift from God and that they have a duty to protect it for future generations. They demonstrate justice by advocating for the

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), 64.

¹⁵ Jame Schaefer, “Converting to and Nurturing Ecological Consciousness—Individually, Collectively, Actively” (2018). (Theology Faculty Research and Publications. 680.) https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_fac/680. Here, the author provides a short summary of the article.

poor and vulnerable who are often most affected by environmental degradation. They limit consumption to the necessities of life, avoid wasteful practices that are detrimental to other species, ecological systems, and the biosphere of Earth. They approach their stewardship of the Earth with a long-term perspective, recognizing that the actions taken today will have consequences for generations to come. They view themselves as part of a larger community of living beings and recognize the importance of cooperation and mutual support for all species to thrive.

Ecologically conscious individuals view the environment not just as a resource to be used for human benefit but as an intrinsic part of God's creation, deserving of reverence and respect. They seek to live in harmony with nature, recognizing the inherent value of all species and ecosystems and striving to live in a way that respects the natural environment and laws of nature. Ultimately, their actions reflect a deep reverence for the Earth and all its inhabitants as manifestations of God's presence in the world. Ecologically conscious people cooperate with God by limiting and directing technology to a constructive type of progress that promotes human dignity and assessing and mitigating harm caused to other species and systems of Earth.

Ecologically conscious people are propelled by virtues that promote environmental well-being. They have an ingrained sense of responsibility to engage in dialogue with others about their relationships with the environment and make decisions for mutual flourishing. They express their compassion for the poor and vulnerable by addressing environmental injustices, providing fresh foods and green spaces, and advocating for protective laws. Ecologically conscious individuals are persistent and put the common good before their personal interests, facing challenges with conviction and without being deterred by obstacles. They draw upon God's grace to remain steadfast in their commitment to the Earth community.

5. Forming and Nurturing an Ecological Conscience

5.1. Traditional sources for Christian spiritual cultivation

To nurture an ecological conscience is to tend to it as one would a garden, with a constant and loving act of care. Just as a garden requires attention and nourishment to flourish, so too must we cultivate our ecological consciousness. Reflection on our faith and its teachings is a fertile soil in which to sow the seeds of this consciousness. We can begin by immersing ourselves in the biblical accounts of creation, which unveil the sanctity of all living things and the importance of stewardship. These teachings remind us that while humans were

given dominion over the earth, we are also called to protect and preserve it, as faithful stewards of creation.

As we tend to our ecological conscience, we can look to the inspiring leadership of Christian visionaries who have spoken out against environmental degradation and called for greater care and protection of the natural world. They serve as the sun, illuminating the path towards a more sustainable future. By following their lead, we can deepen our own commitment to ecological stewardship, and in turn, inspire others to do the same.

Taking practical steps to reduce our environmental impact is a crucial component of nurturing our ecological consciousness. We can take actions such as conserving water, reducing energy consumption, and recycling, as we tend to the flourishing of the earth. Supporting policies and initiatives that promote sustainable practices and protect the environment is another way in which we can tend to our ecological garden, planting the seeds for a more equitable and sustainable future. By living in harmony with the earth and its ecosystems, we can ensure that future generations inherit a world that is teeming with life and possibility.

Christianity offers a wealth of resources to help the faithful cultivate ourselves spiritually, which facilitates the formation and nurturing of an ecological conscience. At the heart of Christian self-cultivation lie intentional practices that nurture our relationship with God and foster growth in faith, wisdom, and character. Whether through prayer, Bible reading and study, worship, service, or fellowship, there are countless ways in which we can deepen our connection to the divine. These practices are not just arbitrary rituals, but rather essential components of a vibrant and fulfilling Christian life. By engaging in these activities regularly, we can enrich our faith, expand our horizons, and develop a more profound sense of purpose and meaning. While the particular forms and content of these activities may vary among the denominations, they constitute fundamental elements that contribute to a spiritually well-rounded Christian.

In the journey of Christian spiritual self-cultivation, prayer is a sacred and transformative practice that enables believers to connect with God and seek God's divine guidance and wisdom. As the psalmist reminds us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Ps 50:15). It is a deeply personal and intimate experience, and while there are no fixed rules for prayer, Christians have long considered it to be a vital tool for spiritual growth. As Saint Augustine once said, "God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them." Prayer is an essential practice that helps Christians to open our hands and hearts to receive the

blessings that God has in store for us. Through prayer, believers can offer thanks, seek forgiveness, and express our deepest hopes and fears, fostering a deeper connection with God and a greater understanding of God's will.

At the heart of Christian devotion lies worship, a practice that allows us to express our reverence and love for God in various forms. As the Psalmist declares, "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness" (Ps 96:9), emphasizing the importance of offering our adoration to the divine. Worship services provide a space for believers to gather together and draw closer to God. Singing hymns and songs of praise, reading the Bible, praying, and participating in sacraments such as the Eucharist are all ways in which we can experience the power and spiritual fruits of worship. The author of Hebrews reminds us of the significance of attending church services, urging us to "not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25). Through worship, we can deepen our connection to God, gain a greater understanding of our faith, and appreciate more fully God's love for all of creation. Worship is a transformative tool for Christian self-cultivation. Through worship, we can experience a profound sense of inner peace and fulfillment that can positively impact our lives and the lives of those around us.

Another vital means of spiritual self-cultivation for Christians across denominations is Bible reading and study. These activities serve as integral components for gaining knowledge and wisdom and understanding God's will and help Christians to love the Word of God as well as God of the Word. As Saint Jerome, one of the most important figures in the early Christian Church, declared, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" (Letter 30). Jerome's sentiment highlights the importance of studying the Bible for Christians. The Bible is the primary source of teaching, providing guidance for living an authentic Christian life. In fact, as the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Regular Bible study and reading provide individuals with the opportunity to gain insights into God's character and the ways in which God works. Through regular Bible study and reflection, Christians can develop a deeper understanding of God and our faith, helping us to live a more spiritually fulfilled and virtuous life. Indeed, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

An essential aspect of a well-developed Christian spirituality is the community. As the Church Father Tertullian once wrote, “We are a body knit together as such by a common religious belief, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope.”¹⁶ Jesus himself formed a community of disciples, who supported and shared life with him as he carried out his mission. Christian fellowship is the coming together of believers who share the same faith, united in Christ. It offers an opportunity to build relationships, share biblical knowledge, and encourage one another in the faith. In his letter to one of the early Christian communities, Paul exhorted, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thess 5:11). The importance of fellowship lies in providing support, guidance, and community to help Christians grow spiritually. One can find fellowship through small groups, meals, weekly gatherings, and even social media platforms. Through Christian fellowship, individuals can establish meaningful relationships, accompany one another spiritually, and join hands in creating a more flourishing world for all.

Service is the lifeblood of Christian spirituality, a vital component of self-cultivation that enables believers to put our faith into action. Whether it’s volunteering at a local soup kitchen, visiting the sick, or participating in an environmental clean-up project, acts of service provide an opportunity to develop virtues such as compassion and empathy that lie at the heart of the Christian faith. Perhaps the greatest example of Christian service in modern times is Mother Teresa. She dedicated her life to serving the poorest of the poor, founding the Missionaries of Charity and ministering to the sick, hungry, and dying in some of the world’s most impoverished communities. For Mother Teresa, service was not just about meeting physical needs, but also about showing love and compassion to those who had been rejected and forgotten by society. Her words, “We can do no great things, only small things with great love,” embody the humble, loving response that service requires. By adopting this attitude towards service, Christians can deepen our own spiritual journeys while fulfilling our call to love our neighbors as ourselves.

5.2. Recontextualizing spiritual development to environmental concerns

While many Christians may have already employed some or all of these means in our spiritual development, they have not always been tailored to the context of environmental care. Traditionally, these

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Apology*, 39, trans. S. Thelwall, Early Christian Writings, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian01.html>.

spiritual activities have often focused primarily on personal piety and social concerns, neglecting the broader ecological dimensions of our faith. However, in the face of the pressing ecological challenges we now confront, it is imperative that we adapt and expand our spiritual practices to encompass care for creation.

Incorporating these spiritually fruitful Christian activities into the context of care for creation allows us to align our faith with ecological matters. By consciously integrating environmental concerns into our spiritual lives, we can bridge the gap between our religious beliefs and our responsibility as stewards of the Earth. Through prayer, we can develop a profound connection with the Creator and seek guidance in our environmental efforts. We can express gratitude for the beauty and abundance of nature, seek forgiveness for the harm caused to the environment, and petition for strength and wisdom to undertake sustainable actions. By weaving ecological themes into our prayers, we can foster a deep sense of reverence for creation and cultivate a partnership with God in the task of caring for our common home.

Worship, as an integral part of our Christian practice, provides a communal space to celebrate and honor God's creation. By incorporating environmental elements into our worship services, such as hymns, prayers, and liturgies that acknowledge the interdependence of all living beings and the need for ecological justice, we can deepen our spiritual connection with the natural world. Worship becomes an opportunity not only to praise God but also to recommit to environmental stewardship, recognizing that our care for creation is an essential expression of our faith.

Bible study and reflection play a crucial role in shaping our Christian beliefs and values. By examining biblical passages that speak to the care of creation, such as the Genesis creation accounts, the Psalms' hymns of praise for the wonders of nature, or Jesus' teachings on love and responsibility, we can gain a deeper understanding of God's intentions for the earth and humanity's role within it. Engaging in ecologically informed Bible study and reflection equips us with a scriptural foundation for our environmental ethics, inspiring us to integrate ecological concerns into our daily lives and decisions.

Fellowship and community provide vital support and encouragement in our pursuit of environmental care. By gathering with like-minded believers, we can share experiences, exchange knowledge, and collaborate on practical initiatives that promote sustainability and justice. In the context of care for creation, Christian fellowship becomes a space for education, advocacy, and collective action, enabling us to amplify our efforts and effect meaningful change in our local communities and beyond.

Finally, acts of service rooted in care for creation become a tangible expression of Christian love and compassion for the earth and its inhabitants. By engaging in environmentally focused service projects, we actively demonstrate our commitment to the well-being of our common home. Whether it is participating in conservation efforts, advocating for sustainable policies, or promoting responsible consumption, these acts of service allow us to embody our faith and be agents of positive transformation in the world.

6. Conclusion

The imperative to form and nurture a Christian ecological conscience is an ongoing and urgent imperative for Christian disciples of our time. Through numerous documents at the universal and local levels, the Catholic Church has called for ecological awareness and responsibility in the face of ongoing environmental degradation. Reflection on our faith and its teachings serves as fertile soil in which we can sow the seeds of this consciousness. By recontextualizing our Christian sources and practices for spiritual formation and development towards environmental concerns, we align our faith with our ecological conscience and foster a transformative shift in our attitudes and behaviors towards the natural world. As we nurture our ecological conscience, we become catalysts for change, inspiring others to embrace a holistic vision of faith that encompasses environmental care. By fulfilling our sacred duty as responsible stewards of creation, we actively participate in the healing and restoration of the Earth. Through the integration of our spiritual practices with environmental care, we contribute to a more sustainable and just world, embodying the love, compassion, and responsibility that are central to the Christian faith.

ABSTRACTS

Inmitten anhaltender ökologischer Krisen hat die Weltgemeinschaft erkannt, wie wichtig es ist, sich mit ökologischen Fragen auseinanderzusetzen und eine nachhaltige Verbindung zur Umwelt herzustellen. Während sich die Menschheit mit den tiefgreifenden Folgen von Umweltzerstörung und Klimawandel auseinandersetzt, haben sich verschiedene philosophische, ethische und spirituelle Perspektiven herausgebildet, die unsere kollektive Reaktion leiten sollen. Ein Schlüsselaspekt dieses Bestrebens ist die Entwicklung eines ökologischen Bewusstseins in jedem Einzelnen. Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die christliche Tradition, insbesondere innerhalb der katholischen Kirche, als wertvolle Quelle für die Bildung und Pflege eines ökologischen Gewissens. Unter Rückgriff auf biblische und lehramtliche Quellen werden die Konzepte der ökologischen Umkehr, des ökologischen Gewissens und des ökologischen

Bewusstseins untersucht, wobei die Notwendigkeit eines Wandels in den Einstellungen und Verhaltensweisen gegenüber der Umwelt betont wird. Indem sie ein ökologisches Gewissen entwickeln und spirituelle Praktiken mit der Verantwortung für die Umwelt verbinden, tragen christliche Jünger zur Schaffung einer nachhaltigeren und gerechteren Welt bei. Dieser Aufsatz ruft dazu auf, christliche spirituelle Quellen und Praktiken neu zu verstehen und sie mit ökologischen Belangen in Einklang zu bringen, um eine zielgerichtete Bildung und Pflege eines ökologischen Gewissens zu ermöglichen.

En medio de las continuas crisis ecológicas, la comunidad mundial ha reconocido la importancia crítica de abordar los problemas ecológicos y forjar una conexión sostenible con el medio ambiente. Mientras la humanidad lidia con las profundas consecuencias de la degradación medioambiental y el cambio climático, han surgido diversas perspectivas filosóficas, éticas y espirituales para guiar nuestra respuesta colectiva. Un aspecto clave de este empeño es el desarrollo de una conciencia ecológica en cada individuo. Este ensayo explora la tradición cristiana, en particular dentro de la Iglesia católica, como fuente valiosa para formar y alimentar una conciencia ecológica. Basándose en fuentes bíblicas y magisteriales, profundiza en los conceptos de conversión ecológica, conciencia ecológica y sabiduría ecológica, subrayando la necesidad de un cambio transformador en las actitudes y comportamientos hacia el medio ambiente. Al alimentar una conciencia ecológica e integrar las prácticas espirituales con la administración medioambiental, los discípulos cristianos contribuyen a la creación de un mundo más sostenible y justo. Este ensayo aboga por una reimaginación de las fuentes y prácticas espirituales cristianas para alinearlas con las preocupaciones ecológicas, lo que permitiría una formación decidida y el cultivo de una conciencia ecológica.

Au milieu des crises écologiques récurrentes, la communauté globale a reconnu l'importance de traiter les questions écologiques et de tisser un lien durable avec l'environnement. Alors que l'humanité se débat avec les conséquences profondes de la dégradation de l'environnement et du changement climatique, diverses perspectives philosophiques, éthiques et spirituelles ont émergé pour guider notre réponse collective. Un aspect-clé de ces tentatives est le développement d'une conscience écologique en chaque individu. Cet essai explore la tradition chrétienne, particulièrement dans l'Église catholique, comme source précieuse pour former et nourrir une conscience écologique et une prise de conscience, soulignant la nécessité d'une transformation des attitudes et comportements envers l'environnement. En nourrissant une conscience écologique et en intégrant des pratiques spirituelles au service de l'environnement, les disciples du Christ contribuent à la création d'un monde plus juste et durable. Cet essai appelle à imaginer de nouvelles sources et pratiques spirituelles chrétiennes, pour les conformer au souci écologique en vue d'une formation adéquate et afin de nourrir une conscience écologique.