

## ***Fire in the Water: Baptismal Aptness and Ecology in the Petrine Epistles***

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*Abstract* — Despite some notable and vocal objections, the claim that Christians bear a responsibility toward the environment is now more or less a truism. In this article, I seek to strengthen, rather than prove, that commitment by an argument *ex convenientia* (from aptness). I analyze the Petrine epistles' imagery of water and fire. I make explicit the connections between these images and the sacrament of baptism as well as their connection to creation, redemption, and the eschatological consummation. By this analysis, I aim to forge reinforcing symbolic links between biblical interpretation, sacramental practice, and the created order, thereby solidifying and foregrounding Christian commitments to ecological engagement. My primary theological interlocutors are Karl Barth and Sergius Bulgakov, whom I consult to make sense of the imagery of water and fire, respectively. My treatment of Barth and Bulgakov allows me to use their respective theologies to supplement what I perceive as one another's weak points. This gives an ecology that is concretely rooted in the Christ event (from Barth), and which demands human participation and sacramentality (from Bulgakov).

*Key Words* — *Petrine epistles, baptism, ecology, semiotics, Barth, Bulgakov, fire, water, priesthood*

Christian initiation begins with the baptismal confession of belief in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. So from its very inception the Christian life is implicated in a proper view of the created order, and therefore in ecological issues. Although Christian approaches to human-environment interaction have varied, the last several years have seen a growing consensus across confessional lines and theological outlooks that humanity bears an important responsibility to the environment, and

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that Christians in particular ought to be involved.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I build on this consensus, and rather than arguing for ecological commitment from Christians, I assume it.<sup>2</sup> Nor do I take up any specific environmental issues (for example, water conservation, the propriety of drilling for oil in wildlife preserves, the use of fossil fuels, strip mining, or the myriad other contested issues). Instead, I examine a particular Christian practice, baptism, and a particular segment of the Christian canon, the Petrine epistles, and explore how these help to form and reinforce Christian ecological commitments. Specifically, by analyzing these epistles' conceptions of water and fire, particularly in light of the sacrament of baptism, I endeavor to show how theological reflection on Scripture and sacramental practice ought to form and disciple Christian approaches to ecology.

In short, I argue that, by virtue of baptism, Christians have a connection to the created order and its renewal through Christ. By virtue of their baptism, Christians are implicated in this renewal. By virtue of their baptism, Christians are directed to hopeful, but not hubristic efforts for the good of the environment, which are best classified as priesthood and therefore a function of baptismal identity. Though the weight of my argument rests on baptismal imagery, I complete it with a more eucharistic account of ecology, which I see as demanded by the trope of priesthood. This is to be expected from the logic of the sacraments, which has baptismal initiation only completed by admittance to the Lord's Table.

The sacrament of baptism lends itself to this analysis because its element, water, affords it great connection with the created world. Moreover, baptism represents the most basic level of Christian commitment. While the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, baptism is the baseline, and a growing consensus recognizes baptism as the ecumenical

1. See, for example, Martha Kirkpatrick, "For God So Loved the World': An Incarnational Ecology," *ATR* 91 (2009) 191–212; David P. Scaer, "Sacraments as an Affirmation of Creation," *CTQ* 57 (1993) 241–64; Georgia Masters Keightley, "The Church's Laity: Called to Be Creation's Priests," *Worship* 84 (2010) 309–27; John Morehead, "The Spirit and the World," *GOTR* 26 (1981) 113–17; Philip Knights, "'The Whole Earth My Altar': A Sacramental Trajectory for Ecological Mission," *Mission Studies* 25 (2008) 56–72; Peter S. Perry, "'Things Having Lives': Ecology, Allusion, and Performance in Revelation 8:9," *CurTM* 37 (2010) 105–13; Stewart M. Benjamin, "Water in Worship: The Ecology of Baptism," *Christian Century* 128/3 (2011) 22–25; Gale Z. Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *JETS* 40 (1997) 37–56; David N. Power, "Worship and Ecology," *Worship* 84 (2010) 290–308; Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The theme of the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society was the care of creation, though the degrees of commitment to ecological concern expressed there varied widely.

2. Therefore, rather than presenting an exhaustive survey of the literature, I simply point readers to the fine discussion of the three primary ecological traditions in theology in Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*.

way forward.<sup>3</sup> Though the churches remain divided regarding the Eucharist, mutual recognition of the “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” is beginning to foster greater unity in spirit.

The epistles of 1 and 2 Peter lend themselves to this investigation because they contain explicit treatment of baptism, creation, and new creation as well as myriad symbolic associations with water, allowing the utility of baptism to extend beyond those sections where it is explicitly in view. Additionally, they contain a recurring and integrative theme in the OT account of Noah and the flood, which has become a mainstay of biblical ecological thought with its concern for preserving animal life.<sup>4</sup> It ultimately has little bearing on my argument who the author of either epistle is, or whether they share the same author. My concern is with the canonical text and not its prehistory, alleged or actual. For simplicity’s sake, I shall refer to the author of both epistles as Peter: a postcritical, rather than uncritical gesture.<sup>5</sup> And, since these two documents are associated in the canonical text, I shall, without hesitation, treat them together, employing inter and intratextual analysis.<sup>6</sup>

This essay proceeds from a particular methodological commitment to the polyvalence of signs, including language. Two primary sources fund and inform this commitment. The first is a particular doctrine of biblical inspiration, helpfully summarized by Henri de Lubac: “The sacred writings were not only inspired one day: the sacred writings themselves are and remain inspired. . . . The Spirit did not only dictate them: he is, as it were, enclosed in them. He dwells here. His breath always animates them. The Scripture is ‘fertile by a miracle of the Holy Spirit’. It is full of the Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> Scripture’s perduringly inspired character allows for the practice of spiritual exegesis, where multiple meanings and senses are to be discovered because Scripture is not merely a written letter, but animated by the Holy Spirit. This allows

3. See, e.g., Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009); World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Lima, 1982).

4. The flood narrative is mentioned in this regard by Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 81; Kirkpatrick, “God So Loved,” 199, 207; Power, “Worship and Ecology,” 299.

5. For thorough treatments of questions regarding authorship, date, *Sitz im Leben*, the relationship between 1 and 2 Peter and Jude, and so on, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 1–75; Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 4–11; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1988) xxxi–lxvii; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 131–63, 3–17; Hubert Frankemölle, *1 Petrusbrief 2 Petrusbrief Judasbrief* (NEchtB; Stuttgart: Echter, 1987) 9–28, 73–87.

6. Despite the general scholarly consensus that 2 Peter is more closely related to Jude, this move is not without precedent. See Green, *1 Peter*, 234–39; Douglas K. Harink, *1 and 2 Peter* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009) 23.

7. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de L'Écriture* (vol. 1/1; Paris: Aubier, 1959) 128 (citing Anselme, *De concord.*, q. 3, c. VI [PL CLVII, 528 B]) (my translation).

for a degree of interpretive freedom, as multiple meanings interplay with one another, which nevertheless remains a ruled freedom.<sup>8</sup> This does not allow interpretation simply to ignore the historical/literal sense, but it does recognize that the Scriptures are meant to have an effect on Christians here and now as well.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, according to Thomas Aquinas, even sticking with the “literal sense” does not rule out potential polyvalence, as the ultimate author of Scripture is God.<sup>10</sup>

The second source is the fundamental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, who articulates Christian existence as fundamentally sacramental, a phrase by which he means more than merely the sacraments of the church.<sup>11</sup> The upshot of all this is that humanity is constituted at its very core by language and signification. Signs are not merely instrumental but constitutive of humanity. We live and move and have our being within symbolic systems in which the various elements interact and conspire to form a whole greater than the sum of the parts.<sup>12</sup> For these reasons, I make free use of the semiotic interplay of the textual signifiers in these epistles. I exploit their linkages and draw out connections that might not have been consciously intended by the texts’ (human) author(s). I argue more *ex convenientia*, or from aptness, than *ex necessitate* because this better comports with (1) my methodological commitments and (2) my purpose in writing: to shore up support for ecological concern rather than demonstrate the need for it. As symbolic associations are formed between biblical interpretation, sacramental practice, and care for the environment, these concerns will be foregrounded in the minds of the faithful.

The riches of the Paschal Mystery are inexhaustible, and therefore the range of meanings and associations we attribute to the sacraments is inexhaustible, so long as sacramental reflection remains rooted in the Christ event. In order to maintain this rootedness, I shall pursue my analysis of water in conversation with an unlikely dialogue partner—Karl Barth, whose rigor in grounding the whole of theology in the concrete event of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is unsurpassed, and who is made a particularly interesting interlocutor by his ultimate rejection of the sacramental.<sup>13</sup> As I trace the lineaments of a sacramental ecology, I shall do so in conversation

8. De Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 1/1:44.

9. *Ibid.*, 1/1:361.

10. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.1.10. This is born out in a recent paper by Stephen Fowl, “The Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, November 17, 2012).

11. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) 161–162.

12. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbole et Sacrement: Une Relecture Sacramentelle de l’Existence Chrétienne* (Paris: du Cerf, 1987) 89–141; *idem*, *Sacraments*, 3–17.

13. Jenkins treats Barth as an exemplar of ecology as “stewardship” (*Ecologies of Grace*, 154–56).

with elements of Barth's doctrine of creation. Later, as I turn to analyze the baptismal symbolism of fire, I shall appropriate insights from Sebastian Brock and Sergius Bulgakov. Placing Barth and Bulgakov alongside one another provides a corrective for problematic aspects of their respective theologies.

#### HEADWATERS: LOCATING BAPTISM IN THE PETRINE EPISTLES

The precise place of baptism in relation to the Petrine correspondence has been ambiguous and contested. While the theory that 1 Peter is a reworked baptismal homily was once in vogue, this view has fallen into disrepute.<sup>14</sup> Still, as I show in this section, there are ample connections between the epistle and baptismal imagery in addition to the pericope that explicitly mentions the sacrament in 3:18–22. This ought to be expected; otherwise, why would the theory have developed in the first place? The presence of such a theory, even if it is now defunct, ought to indicate that the epistle is particularly fecund in connection with the sacrament.

For example, we find the celebration of new birth rooted particularly in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:3; cf. Rom 6:3–5), which constitutes incorporation into the eschatological salvation brought about by the Paschal mystery (1 Pet 1:4–7). Believers have been adopted into God's family (1:17)—a reality closely associated with baptism in Gal 3:23–29, ordained into the priesthood of all believers (2:5),<sup>15</sup> and incorporated into the people of God (2:10; cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Images of incorporation continue in the epistle, with references to Christ's sufferings and believers' participation in them scattered throughout (e.g., 2:18–25; 3:17–18; 4:1–2, 12–13). Baptism signifies and implicates Christians in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. In its waters, they are plunged into the central act of salvation, Christ's death and resurrection, which becomes definitive of their existence. The mystery of Christ unfolds in their lives and enfolds their lives into its contours. This unfolding and enfolding, this incorporation, is variously expressed in the Bible: new birth, adoption, traversing the border of death and resurrection, entering a Body, and so on. And all of these various images are associated with baptism. That these understandings of baptism are Pauline need not defeat my argument. After all, Peter's explicit

14. So Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 54; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 61; Michaels, *1 Peter*, xxxix; David Hill, "Suffering and Baptism in 1 Peter" *NovT* 18 (1976) 181–89.

15. Though they are not explicitly connected in Scripture, baptism and the common priesthood of the laity became closely related in later theological reflection. For a contemporary treatment, see the essays in Susan K. Wood, ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), especially David N. Power, "Priesthood Revisited: Mission and Ministries in the Royal Priesthood," 95–96.

theology of baptism also turns on the “Pauline” idea of union with Christ in his passion and resurrection (3:18–22).

Additionally, Peter’s addressees are said to have been chosen for “sprinkling with Jesus Christ’s blood” (1:2).<sup>16</sup> Because the theory of baptismal homily is now defunct, commentators understand this to refer to the covenant ratification ceremony in Exod 24 rather than to baptism, and draw further connections to the promises of Ezek 36:25.<sup>17</sup> And yet these interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Baptism itself is a covenantal ceremony, and the imagery from Ezekiel of washing with clean water, bestowal of a new heart, and reception of the Holy Spirit is particularly pregnant with baptismal resonances, probably lying in the background of Jesus’ own statements about rebirth by water and Spirit in John 3:5. And, as Achtemeier notes, an understanding of baptism along the lines of Paul’s (namely, identification with the death and resurrection of Christ) would make sense of this passage, though he believes that the association of baptism and sprinkling developed later than this text.<sup>18</sup> But at this point, the argument becomes circular: this cannot be a reference to baptism because sprinkling and baptism were not associated until later, which we know because there are no examples of such an association this early, which we established by ruling out possible examples based on our understanding that this is a later development. This conversion to God is also expressed in 2:25, and in the reference to a good conscience in 3:16. Finally, we find reference to reception of the Holy Spirit, particularly the Spirit resting on Christians (4:14), calling to mind the many associations of the Holy Spirit and baptism, particularly his resting on Jesus at his baptism (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23; John 1:29–34). To anticipate some further steps of my argument, we might also detect echoes of the Spirit’s brooding over the waters of creation in Gen 1:2 and coming to rest in tongues of fire on the nascent church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4).

All these associations are certainly available to later interpreters (which is really all my argument needs), and many of them would have been avail-

16. All NT translations are my own.

17. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 71–73; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 88–89 (though without the connection to Ezekiel). Michaels sees the same background, but notes that, in Heb 10:22, this does take on a baptismal character and that the same typology is in play with regard to the sacraments (*1 Peter*, 12–13); so also Donald P. Senior, but with stronger baptismal overtone (“1 Peter,” in *1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter* [by Donald P. Senior and Daniel J. Harrington; SP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003] 29). Frankemölle detects reference to the Exodus text as well (*Petrus-brief*, 32–35). Jean Calloud and François Genuyt do not connect this image with biblical precedents but rather note that it implicates Christians in the possibility of suffering with Christ. Their semiotic analysis further leads them to connect this address with incorporation into the people of God, in contrast to exiles in dispersion (*La Première Épître de Pierre: Analyse Semiotique* [Paris: du Cerf, 1982] 35–37).

18. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 88.

able to the epistle's first audience. However, in many cases, the connections go beyond free association and are forged by Peter himself. So, for instance, obedience and sprinkling are coordinated in 1:2, while obedience and new birth are coordinated in 1:21–22, thereby linking sprinkling with new birth. Similarly, the notion of a good conscience is a hallmark of the paraenesis in 3:16, and then explicitly linked to baptism in 3:21, clearly extending the baptismal import beyond the section about Noah and the flood. Finally, the new birth is tied to the resurrection of Christ in 1:3, while baptismal efficacy is tied to the resurrection in 3:21, clearly establishing a Petrine link between baptism and rebirth.<sup>19</sup> So although 1 Peter might not be a baptismal homily, and although it might not be about baptism *per se*, baptism can be about 1 Peter, allowing the epistle to be a resource in this connection.

Beyond the more indirect resonances with baptismal imagery, 1 Peter does contain one explicit reference to baptism in 3:18–22. Nestled within a larger discourse urging Christians to endure persecution for Christ's sake, this passage contains several contested elements, including a *descensus* (3:19) and allusions to Enochic traditions (3:20). For my purposes, it is not vital to untangle all of these elements; I leave that to the commentators.<sup>20</sup> What does matter is the clear connection forged between the flood, the ark, and baptism (3:20–22). As Jean Calloud and François Genuyt note, this is an active and intentional move on Peter's part: "The mention of the Flood is not brought in by itself: one does not think *about* the Flood, but *with* the Flood to another thing, to understand baptism. Baptism is the message of which the Flood is the code."<sup>21</sup> The Flood represents God's watery judgment on sinful creation. The Ark safely bore Noah's family (comprised of the eschatologically significant number 8)<sup>22</sup> through this tide of judgment and wrath. Passing through the waters of baptism is seen as functioning similarly, bearing the faithful through the flood of judgment, and safely through to the other side.<sup>23</sup> All this is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus (3:21–22), who spoke of his own crucifixion as baptism (Mark 9:35–40). In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the eschatological judgment has taken place, overwhelming him on the cross. Baptism implicates Christians in this judgment with the result that in Christ they have

19. So also Michaels, *1 Peter*, 221; Frankemölle, *Petrusbrief*, 33.

20. See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 239–74; Jobs, *1 Peter*, 235–60; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 194–222; Green, *1 Peter*, 118–38; Senior, "1 Peter," 99–112; Frankemölle, *Petrusbrief*, 59–63.

21. Calloud and Genuyt, *Analyse Semiotique*, 185 (my translation).

22. On the eschatologically charged character of the number eight see, e.g., Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973) 52, 77.

23. *Pace* Achtemeier, who sees salvation through water as salvation from the evil generation by way of the flood, rather than salvation through the watery judgment of the flood by means of the Ark (*1 Peter*, 265–66). Green shares my understanding that the latter option is in view (*1 Peter*, 137), as do Michaels (*1 Peter*, 213) and Senior ("1 Peter," 104).

already passed through the dreadful flood and emerged safely on the other side. Clearly, Peter associates the waters of baptism with the waters of judgment, specifically the waters of judgment that swept away the ancient world in the time of Noah.

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE:  
AQUATIC SEMIOTICS AND BARTHIAN EXEGESIS

This connection with the Noahic flood serves as the semiotic anchor for several other elements. In 2 Pet 2:5, the flood is once more an example of God's righteous judgment. And in 2 Pet 3:5, we are reminded that "the earth was constituted from water and through water by the Word of God, by which the former world perished, flooded with water." So Peter connects the waters of the flood with the waters over which the Spirit hovered at the creation. Indeed, he casts the flood as a de-creation and re-creation. The old world passed away in the deluge, and a brave new world emerged. This is not a Petrine novelty, but follows on how the Genesis account presents the Flood: the rains pour down and the *těhóm* wells up, recalling the primordial state of creation. At this juncture, Barth's exegesis of the creation sagas is quite illuminating. To Barth, the fundamental outlook of Gen 1:2 is negative. The earth is formless and void (*těhú wábóbú*), a phrase used twice elsewhere in the Bible in Jer 4:23 and Isa 34:11 to describe the desolation wrought by God's judgment. "Thus," writes Barth, "the condition of the earth depicted in v. 2 is identical with the whole horror of the final judgment."<sup>24</sup> Barth argues that the formless void of the original creation signals, from the very beginning, the possibility of God's judgment on his creation.

So far so good. But Barth's exegesis is not without problems. In his desire to avoid any autonomy for creation, or synergy between God and humanity, Barth constructs so negative an appraisal that he sees the brooding Holy Spirit as "condemned to the complete impotence of a bird hovering or brooding over shoreless and sterile waters," unable to do anything without the Word of God.<sup>25</sup> Yet surely this is going too far. First, Barth's impotent Spirit seems to violate the principle that the *opera ad extra indivisa sunt*. And indeed, it is typically the Holy Spirit's *tropos byparxeos* to lend fructification, vitality, and efficacy to God's works. To view the Spirit as a symbol of impotence or sterility is problematic to say the least. Second, it fails to recognize that even within the first creation account, "we encounter two distinct types of divine declarations: the fiats of *ex nihilo* creation . . .

24. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight; 4 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) 3/1:105. Hereafter, *CD*. All references to the *Church Dogmatics* are to this edition.

25. Barth, *CD*, 3/1:107.

and God's command to creation to put forth its own powers with which he has endowed it and within which the Spirit is operative."<sup>26</sup> Given this, it seems entirely reasonable to view the Holy Spirit's activity in Gen 1:2 as a maternal brooding, signaling creation's fecundity. Already, then, the entirely negative construal of water is attenuated.

In addition, there is another strand of biblical witness that evaluates water far more positively. God's blessing is expanded as these waters become four rivers flowing from and around the Edenic proto-temple.<sup>27</sup> Water flowed out of the eschatological temple in Ezekiel's vision, renewing the face of the entire earth (47:1–12). Water flowed out of the pierced side of the crucified Savior, the eschatological temple *par excellence* (John 19:34), giving birth to the new creation of the church, the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:22). A river of life flows through the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1–5), the dwelling place of God and humanity. Barth is not unaware of this alternate witness regarding water,<sup>28</sup> and sees it beginning in the second saga, where water is the *sine qua non* of human life and labor. What had been the enemy of God's purposes and a threat to human existence is now humanity's "companion" and "friend."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Barth sees the two streams as ultimately "transcended and placed in a larger context of truth,"<sup>30</sup> particularly as the one stream—water as threat and enemy—is subsumed into the other, so that "it is no longer the suppressed enemy of man but his most intimate friend. It is no longer his destruction but his salvation. It is not a principle of death but of life."<sup>31</sup> In a particularly beautiful passage, Barth sums up this dynamic:

But the second saga considers the fact that even the death of man as the work of the divine wrath is from the very outset, in the true and final depth of its dreadfulness, the grace of God. It is also true that water is the sign of the end of all things. But the second saga considers the fact that on the far side of the end of all things the true will and act of God have their beginning, so that it is able to see in the sign of that end the sign of its beginning. It is also true that Jesus Christ will calm the storm of the sea and walk on its waves, and that His apostle will follow Him in the same way, and that finally the sea will become

26. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 345.

27. G. K. Beale provides a helpful biblical theology of the theme of temple (*The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004]).

28. Indeed, Barth makes use of most of these images and adds a few others in his exegesis of water (CD 3/1:278–81).

29. *Ibid.*, 3/1:241.

30. *Ibid.*, 3/1:102–10, 276–81. Jenkins traces two different accounts of environmental stewardship from these two accounts (*Ecologies of Grace*, 160–74).

31. Barth, CD, 3/1:280.

the crystal sea and thus cease to be dangerous, or even to be the former sea at all. But the second saga considers the fact that Jesus Christ will create living water, giving the thirsty drink and making them springs of water.<sup>32</sup>

In this light, Barth is correct in noting tensions and ambiguities in the treatment of water. Judgment is indeed in view. But, as his own argument shows, this is not incompatible with life and salvation.

This is because the judgment in view here is finally fulfilled in “the moment of darkness in which His own creative Word, His only begotten Son, will cry on the cross of Calvary: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”<sup>33</sup> The old world died in the Son of God on the cross. And on the cross, God condemns humanity and in so doing saves humanity. The old world perishes, but in the same breath the new world is born. The baptismal overtones are particularly rich here: de-creation and re-creation, judgment and salvation, water and the Holy Spirit.

These baptismal overtones can help rescue Barth from himself. Barth’s great strength is his Christocentrism. Yet, in many ways, it is also his weakness. Everything that must happen has happened in Christ. But then how do human beings participate in this? Over and over, the only humanity that matters is the Man Christ Jesus. It is almost as though humanity is swallowed up in and obliterated in Christ rather than consummated and redeemed. Barth’s conception of salvation is dynamic, apposite to Eastern accounts of theosis, but all the dynamism, all the divinizing, seems to happen in Jesus, leaving the rest of us behind.<sup>34</sup> Bridging this gap is a role one might expect to find the Holy Spirit playing in Barth’s theology. Yet, for all Barth’s promise as a truly Trinitarian theologian, several have observed a lacuna in his pneumatology.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, the sacrament of baptism allows for a pneumatologically dynamic and participatory salvation, which remains in intimate connection to the economic reality of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Water is a diverse, tension-laden symbol in the Bible. And all of the Bible’s various watery images are caught up together and coalesce along with others in the baptismal font, which is at once the tomb of the

32. *Ibid.*, 3/1:281.

33. *Ibid.*, 3/1:109.

34. *Ibid.*, 4/1:93, 228–30, 253–55; *ibid.*, 4/2:403, 409–11; See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (trans. John Drury; Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972) 185; Kimlyn J. Bender, *Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). Bender traces this as an outworking of the structure of Barth’s Christology.

35. E.g., Robert W. Jenson, “You Wonder Where the Spirit Went,” in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (ed. Eugene F. Rogers; West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 9–18; Eugene E. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 19–23.

old creation and the womb of the new.<sup>36</sup> Baptism, like the cross and resurrection in which it participates, takes the instrument of our destruction, and turns it into the instrument of our salvation. God's judgment does not cease to be judgment. The death of humanity does not cease to be humanity's death. Nothing is taken away. Instead, something is added. Judgment is now also deliverance. Death is now also life. Condemnation is now also justification. And the ambiguous symbolism of water makes baptism uniquely suited to communicate this dialectic.

In baptism, we are initiated into a truly immersive field of symbolic discourse wherein the Bible's many and varied associations with water, creation, and new creation intermingle and interplay. Every baptism is tied to and rooted in the primordial creation.<sup>37</sup> And every baptism is tied to and rooted in the new creation inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Every baptism is a rebirth from the womb of the Virgin Mary,<sup>38</sup> from the wound in Jesus' side.<sup>39</sup> Every baptism is a drowning in the flood of judgment and a resurrection from the garden tomb. Every baptism is an escape from that same flood in the Ark of Christ and the church. Every baptism is a traversing the red sea, passing from bondage to freedom. Every baptism is a plunging into the River of Life. Every baptism is Christ's own baptism in the Jordan River, by which he sanctified all the waters of the earth.<sup>40</sup> And in the foregoing, I use the word *is*, not as a simple copulative, but as an ontologically potent verb. The semiotic at work is not the endless interplay of signifiers giving ambiguous voice to an ultimately baseless *différance*. Instead, as Aquinas argues, biblical/revelatory polyvalence is not limited to wordplay but forges a real connection between the things themselves.<sup>41</sup> All these realities are truly, though mysteriously, implicated in one another. The line between aptness and necessity draws thinner.

36. So also Styles, who notes that fourth-century architectural evidence shows that the Fathers were prone to associating the various biblical water miracles with baptism ("Rising Loaves," 172-75). This is well documented by Sebastian P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2008) 102-6 (though it extends beyond the Syrian Tradition).

37. So also *ibid.*, 98-102.

38. So also *ibid.*, 151-53.

39. So also *ibid.*, 107-14.

40. See Rogers, *After the Spirit*, 136-48. Rogers draws from Patristic sources in this regard, particularly the Eastern Fathers, but this sentiment was not foreign to Luther's thought; see Benjamin, "Water in Worship," 25. So also Brock, *Baptismal Tradition*, 91-96. Indeed, as Schmemmann notes, the blessing of baptismal waters is not so much an elevation beyond water's natural state, but rather a revelation of water's true nature and purpose and a restoration to that purpose (*Life of the World*, 72-75).

41. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.1.10.

I HOLD WITH THOSE WHO FAVOR FIRE:  
AN INFERNAL AUDIT IN CONVERSATION WITH BULGAKOV

Thus far, we have treated the epistles' associations with water. But there remains one further symbolic connection to baptism to explore, that of fire. And once more, we find this conceptual resource provided by Peter himself. Just after chronicling the ancient world's demise in the waters of the flood, he writes:

But the current heavens and earth are being preserved by that same word and kept for fire on the day of judgment and destruction of all the impiety of humans. . . . And the day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise and the elements, burning, will be dissolved, and the earth and the works in it will be discovered . . . the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements, burning, will melt. But according to the promise we await a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet 3:7, 10, 12–13)

The flood is not only connected to the various aquatic tropes of Scripture, but also with the fiery deluge that awaits the world, opening up a new symbolic vista. I have already traced the biblical association of water with cosmic renewal. But in this regard, the Bible employs the additional image of fire. Though seemingly opposite, the symbolic freight of water and fire overlap a great deal. They can both purify. They can both destroy. They can both give life (cf. Acts 2).<sup>42</sup> Fire is more specifically associated with the Holy Spirit, a fact notably picked up in the Syrian tradition, which frequently casts the baptismal font as a furnace, wherein believers are re-forged and the image of God is recast.<sup>43</sup> As Ephraim the Syrian writes, "See, Fire and Spirit are in the womb of her who bore you, Fire and Spirit are in the river in which you were baptized; Fire and Spirit are in our baptism, and in the Bread and Cup are Fire and Holy Spirit."<sup>44</sup> Fire, water, and the Holy Spirit are all associated with baptism. John the Baptist spoke of the one to come who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, gathering wheat into the barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:11–12). Jesus spoke of his baptism on the cross in close connection with the fire he had come to kindle on the earth (Luke 12:49–50). Indeed, when, according to Christ's prediction, the apostles were baptized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5), the Holy Spirit descended on them in tongues of fire. Every baptism is also a new Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit descends anew, implicating the faithful in the Bible's varied uses not only of water

42. So also Brock, *Baptismal Tradition*, 15.

43. *Ibid.*, 13–17, 105.

44. Ephraim the Syrian, *De Fide*, 10.17 (cited in Brock, *Baptismal Tradition*, 155–56).

but also of fire by, implicating them in the Paschal Mystery and thereby the final judgment.

Sergius Bulgakov, in typical Orthodox fashion, recognizes in Pentecost the fulfillment of the incarnation. By taking on human nature, Christ prepared the human nature to be a medium of the Holy Spirit.<sup>45</sup> Moving beyond this, he styles the fiery judgment to come as the great Pentecost: "It is precisely the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the transfiguration of the universe: the energy of the Holy Spirit destroys the sinful, imperfect old world and creates a new world, with the renewal of all creation. This is the power of the Fire that burns, melts, transmutes, illuminates, and transfigures."<sup>46</sup> Hence, as with Barth, Bulgakov sees the final judgment as fulfilled in and tied to the Christ event. From first to last, all of God's purposes are realized in Christ.

But in Bulgakov's treatment, this plays out in problematic ways. Owing largely to Bulgakov's sophiology, the typically Eastern emphasis on synergism drifts away from Christ's agency in the renewal of the cosmos. Bulgakov deploys Chalcedonian categories to humanity in general, writing of the "Divine-humanity," leaving us to wonder whether there is anything unique in the incarnation of Christ that is not in principle true of humanity generically conceived.<sup>47</sup> That humanity in general, rather than Christ himself, is the key player in the elevation of nature into divinity—bringing creaturely Sophia into the fullness of communion with the Divine Sophia—only deepens the problematic nature of his formulations.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, Christ prepares humanity to accomplish this, and definitively brings it about, yet ultimately it seems that humanity is left to accomplish it.<sup>49</sup> All this is not without grace, not without the Spirit's power. Bulgakov himself argues for a *trancensus* between the present age and the eschaton, such that the consummation must occur by the Holy Spirit's agency and not as a result of any evolutionary process.<sup>50</sup> Yet still a problematic downplaying of the centrality of Christ's work is at play here. Bulgakov's cosmic, sophianic Christ runs the risk of losing the economic concreteness of Jesus of Nazareth.

By way of conclusion, I shall try to correct this fault with Barth, while also correcting Barth's shortcomings. But first, let us draw our semiotic analysis to a close. In Peter's mind, a great watery baptism once engulfed the ancient world and a great fiery baptism awaits the present created order.

45. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans. Boris Jakim; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 422–23. Jenkins also treats Bulgakov as a model for eco-spirituality (*Ecologies of Grace*, 201–25).

46. *Ibid.*, 421.

47. *Ibid.*, 143.

48. *Ibid.*, 130–46.

49. *Ibid.*, 403–4.

50. *Ibid.*, 384.

Out of this conflagration, a new, renewed creation is to emerge, one where righteousness dwells. So the fiery end is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end, becoming associated with the new creation. Baptism is a personal prolepsis of this final judgment and restoration. And the final judgment, followed by a new heavens and a new earth, is a cosmic consummation of the reality of baptism. The old has passed away; all things have become new. All of these realities are connected to one another in varying degrees of closeness and explicitness in Peter's writing, with Noah's ark anchoring them to one another.

In Christian sacramental practice, God uses the very stuff of creation to bring himself, his life, and his love to us through the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The material of creation is caught up into the worship of God, and we are incorporated into the divine life. In Christian sacramental practice, the original creation, the redemption of the world through Jesus' death and resurrection, and its attendant eschatological new beginning collide in our lives, in our very bodies. This sacramental collision begins in baptism and extends throughout all of life unto the ages of ages. The Petrine epistles present a vision of God's judgment and renewal of the earth. Whether by the primordial waters of the flood or the eschatological fire of the great Pentecost, God remains intimately involved in and concerned with his creation. In the person and work of Christ, this care and involvement reaches its zenith, and the eschatological day dawns with his resurrection. In Peter's thought, judgment and salvation, destruction and renewal, water and fire, all overlap, with baptism never any farther than a conceptual step away.

In baptism, the beginning, end, and new beginning of the world coalesce, sweeping us along in the tide. As David Scaer notes, "It is not that in creation, redemption, and sanctification we move from any one work of God to another, but that every work of God recapitulates an earlier work from which it derives its form and substance. Creation anticipates its redemption and sanctification, and redemption and sanctification presuppose the creation."<sup>51</sup> Protology and eschatology belong together, as they both occur outside of the historically accessible. Bulgakov writes of the first creation as "meta-history" and the eschaton as "supratemporality."<sup>52</sup> Baptism locates us in the interval between the two—proleptically participants in the new creation, while also living in the old; projected simultaneously backward and forward. Therefore, baptized Christians have a vested interest in the proper treatment of creation. Our baptism semiotically resonates with and therefore participates in the original creation of the world and its final destiny. Therefore, Christians must care for and resist the exploitation of God's creation. By using created matter to bring us into

51. Scaer, "Sacraments as Affirmation of Creation," 248.

52. Bulgakov, *Bride*, 178–81, 384.

the life of God, baptism teaches us to hold material reality in high regard, while at the same time reminding us that our regard for materiality is not ultimate but rather penultimate. “Unless redemption is understood and defined in regard to creation, creation is relegated to a mere past-tense event, as was done by the historic gnostics [*sic*] who also disparaged it. The use of created substances in the sacraments is an endorsement of creation.”<sup>53</sup> By locating us in the interval between this life and the life of world to come, baptism attunes us to patterns of continuity and discontinuity. Our bodily experience in the sacrament testifies that God has an ongoing and eternal purpose for his material creation. Therefore, we cannot discard or disregard it.

This helps to guard against a potential misunderstanding stemming from 2 Pet 3:10–12, the sort of misunderstanding that leads Jonathan Moo to opine that “if Romans 8 is the most popular text with Christian environmentalists, 2 Peter 3 is perhaps the least,”<sup>54</sup> and Edward Adams to call it “at first sight, one of the least eco-friendly texts in the New Testament.”<sup>55</sup> If the present creation is going to be burnt up and melt, does that not work against an ecological concern? If the world is inevitably going to crash and burn, why bother with preservation? This approach is wrong for several reasons. First, the flood, to which the fiery deluge is linked, does not destroy the world, but renews and recreates it.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it is the same humanity—Noah and his seven—who repopulate the earth, rather than a *de novo* humanity. Even Adams, who views the passage as presenting a destruction of the earth instead of its renovation, notes that “for the author of 2 Peter, the new heavens and earth are not a *creatio ex nihilo* but a *creatio ex vetere*, a creation out of the old. Material continuity between the present cosmos and the new eschatological creation is assumed.”<sup>57</sup> Second, Pentecost, to which Bulgakov and I have connected the Petrine fire, does not do away with the created order either. Instead, the Holy Spirit uses already extant

53. Scaer, “Sacraments as Affirmation of Creation,” 249.

54. Jonathan Moo, “Continuity, Discontinuity, and Hope: The Contribution of New Testament Eschatology to a Distinctively Christian Environmental Ethos,” *TynBul* 61 (2010) 30.

55. Edward Adams, “Retrieving the Earth from the Conflagration: 2 Peter 3:5–13 and the Environment,” in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (ed. David G. Horrell et al.; London: T. & T. Clark, 2010) 108. This assessment is shared by Barbara R. Rossing, “Hastening the Day When the Earth Will Burn? Global Warming, Revelation, and 2 Peter 3,” in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend* (ed. Ted Grimsurd and Michael Hardin; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011) 89.

56. So also Bauckham, *Jude*, 2 Peter, 299; Moo, “Continuity and Discontinuity,” 36. Contra Adams, “Conflagration,” 112–13. Bauckham further notes that the context of 2 Pet 3 suggests that destruction of the wicked, rather than destruction of the cosmos, is in view (pp. 319–20); this view is shared by Moo (“Continuity and Discontinuity,” 33–35), and rejected by Adams (“Conflagration,” 113–14).

57. Adams, “Conflagration,” 117.

languages to bring about redemption. Third, the cross does not destroy humanity in the sense of obliterating it. Instead, the risen Christ's body bears the scars of his crucifixion. Fourth, baptism, as I noted above, locates us between the times. This means that if we decide we can ignore the here and now for the sake of the then and there, we imperil our salvation. It will be we ourselves who are raised. By connecting baptism with this text, we set the parameters such that if this text authorizes the degradation of the environment, it also authorizes the degradation of our own bodies. 2 Peter 3:10–12 cannot undercut ecology without at the same time undercutting Christianity. After all, Peter himself does not say, "Since all these things are thus to be destroyed, we should all just forget it," but rather he instructs his audience to live chaste and sober lives. Seen in this light the discontinuity Peter highlights here is not a threat to ecology, but highlights the need for divine intervention—a point to which I return below

#### CONFLUENCE: A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Thus far, I have focused my attention on two influential theologians—Karl Barth and Sergius Bulgakov. This in itself is nothing new Willis Jenkins draws from both of them as resources for constructing "ecologies of grace."<sup>58</sup> What I suggest, though, is placing Barth and Bulgakov alongside one another in mutually corrective dialogue. Barth corrects Bulgakov by allowing us to root our formulations more explicitly in the concrete reality of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. And juxtaposing Barth's emphasis on the Christ event with an analysis of baptismal imagery gives Barth a sacramental rehabilitation, while also ensuring that sacramentality does not degenerate into the vagaries of ideals and principles, but rather remains grounded in Christ, the fundamental revelation of God. This mutual correction also allows us to jump the gap between Barth's stewardship-oriented ecology to the more Orthodox conception of care such as priesthood.<sup>59</sup> The trope of priesthood is more resistant to domineering and reifying the created order.<sup>60</sup> This has the added benefit of tying ecological practice more closely to baptismal practice (with baptism as ordering into the general priesthood) and the imagery of the Petrine epistles (where Christians are understood as a kingdom of priests). Bulgakov and Orthodoxy correct Barth toward sacramentality and priesthood. We are not simply tending to creation, but returning it to God in an act of worship, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

58. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 153–225. While my selection of Barth is owing to Jenkins' treatment, which first drew my attention to Barth's exegesis of the creation sagas, my selection of Bulgakov is more directly owing to Harinck, *1 and 2 Peter*, 182.

59. This is where Jenkins classifies Barth, *Ecologies of Grace*, 153–87.

60. Keightley, "Creation's Priests," 309–27.

Priesthood is less open to human domineering because, as priests, human beings are not other than the creation of which we are the priests. Just as bishops and presbyters are first members of the general priesthood, with ordination raising them to a new status *within* the priestly people, rather than giving them a status different *than* the priestly people,<sup>61</sup> so humanity as priests are to be conceived as an order within creation. We do not stand over against the created order but firmly within it. As we offer the creation back to God in the cosmic Eucharist, we are at the same time offering ourselves, body and soul, as a living sacrifice.<sup>62</sup> Once more, then, our offering of creation is also our offering of ourselves, which itself is caught up into Christ's own self-offering of himself and of all creation. In the bread and wine the stuff of creation is changed (by the operation of the Holy Spirit) into the body of Christ so that in us ourselves the stuff of creation might be changed (whether by the operation of the Holy Spirit or by reception of the elements or by both depending on the precise wording of the epiclesis) into the body of Christ. All this to say that we are not fundamentally different from what we offer—a point that accords well with the imagery in Gen 2 of humanity created from the dust of the earth—so that in offering creation we offer ourselves, in offering ourselves we offer creation, and in offering Christ we offer both because Christ has joined both to himself. Rowan Williams articulates this particularly well:

If we are a priestly people, sacramentally enacting our obedience and gratitude to God, bearing fruit for him, what we ritually offer is the beginning of the new creation's harvest—the humanity of Christ, in which the deification of human nature is perfected and offered to us. . . . There are no clear distinctions [in Irenaeus] between the offering (by us) of bread and wine, the offering (by us in Christ) of his deified humanity, and the offering (to us by Christ) of risen life through the “nourishment” of the first fruits of new creation. . . . The agency appears to be human; but in fact all that human beings are doing in each of these instances is involving themselves in the divine action which presents them to the Father. . . . Common baptism connects us to the one priest and his priestly act of consecrating and offering

61. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963) 159–73; Thomas P. Rausch, “Ministry and Ministries,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry* (ed. Susan K. Wood; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003) 60–64; Power, “Priesthood Revisited,” 89, 111; Susan K. Wood, “Conclusion: Convergence Points toward a Theology of Ordered Ministries,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry* (ed. Susan K. Wood; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003) 257, 260–61.

62. For just one example of this self-oblation (which, at the very least has been a historical characteristic of Anglican liturgy and is typically tied to the epiclesis), see *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979) 336, 342, 369, 375.

himself: we appear to take him to ourselves, but it is, more fundamentally, he who takes us to himself.<sup>63</sup>

Willis Jenkins notes that the Eastern Church, particularly following Maximus the Confessor, outlines this trajectory, with the church as “theurgic” and Christian liturgy serving a deifying role, not only for humanity but through humanity also for the entire created order. The Eucharist is a microcosmic enactment of and participation in a macrocosmic work of renewal.<sup>64</sup> Baptism also projects us forward to the time of the end when humankind’s priestly sacrifice of the created order to God is fulfilled through Christ the Great High Priest in the power of the Eternal Spirit. That it is fulfilled through Christ guards against ecological hubris. The corruption engendered by human fallenness is so great that a radical new beginning must occur. Moral reform is not enough; instead, one must be “born again by water and Spirit” (John 3:5). Similarly, the new creation will not arrive by an evolutionary process as humanity becomes increasingly good caretakers. Instead, a great Pentecostal fire will one day engulf the world, burning away all its dross until finally the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwell are disclosed. This imagery ought to leave Christians with a chaste humility regarding the efficacy of their environmental endeavors. So the Barthian concern is satisfied and Bulgakov is corrected away from the problematic synergism to which he is so deeply committed.

While some might conclude that this eschatological *transcensus* leaves humanity free from ecological responsibility, once more baptism guards against error. As noted, baptism locates Christians in an interval between ages, which helps us to recognize the continuity between this world and the world to come. Either to remain uninvolved in environmental care, or wantonly to discard the old is ruled out. That would mean discarding ourselves. We and the created order share an origin and a common destiny. Our pathway from the one to the other is the same: incorporation into the Paschal Mystery, which the various biblical symbols stylize as baptism. Our sacramental participation in Christ forms us to value both the old and the new. Had Christ not valued the old, we would have been damned. Given the parabolic teaching that the proper response to grace is to extend grace (e.g., Matt 18:21–35), we dare not leave the environment to its own fate. And so, far from giving the baptized a reason to neglect ecological matters, Peter’s vision of a fiery purgation leading to a new earth ought to motivate us in our priestly enterprise. It presents an assured hope that *this* perfected

63. Rowan Williams, *Eucharistic Sacrifice: The Roots of a Metaphor* (Grove Liturgical Studies 31; Nottingham: Grove, 1982) 10, 22, 23.

64. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 194–96, 200. The imagery of the cosmic Eucharist is commonplace in Orthodoxy and receives a contemporary restatement in Schmemmann, *Life of the World*, 11–46.

offering is the future. "From age to age you gather a people to yourself so that from East to West a perfect offering may be made."

#### CONCLUSION

From an ecological standpoint, my argument has not tread much, if any, novel ground. The general lineaments of a sacramental ecology are well established. What I have sought to contribute has been twofold. First, by developing my argument in concert with the Petrine epistles, I have—hopefully—provided a richer, more explicitly biblical account of the baptismal imperative for ecological responsibility, while at the same time teasing out these epistles' semiotic potential for baptismal reflection. By taking this path, a fuller account of and basis for ecological practice has emerged. In neither case has this occurred by adding something that was not already there. Instead, the two serve to complement one another and to draw out more explicitly the rich resources already located within the other. Either the sacrament or the Scriptures would be capable of funding ecological commitment. But combining them renders the implicit more explicit, further integrates Christian life and practice with biblical exegesis (and vice versa), and renders testimony to the unity of the Christian deposit when considered in its fullness. Because of the particularly semiotically oriented character of my analysis, it is my hope that strong associative networks be formed for Christians between biblical texts, ecclesial practices, and concern for the environment. If these networks are formed and informed properly, then our responsibility to the environment will be increasingly unavoidable. No encounter with word or sacrament can fail to highlight this connection in more or less inchoate ways. My argument may or may not *prove* anything. But, as I stated from the outset, my goal is not proof; I assume ecological commitment and my goal is simply to reinforce it.

Second, by bringing Barth and Bulgakov into the picture, I have—again, hopefully—allowed their theologies to correct one another, leading to a more satisfactory account of humanity's relation to the rest of the created order than either theologian manages on his own. As we have seen, we are left in Barth with a Christ who does it all without humanity, and in Bulgakov with a humanity that does it all, but is not Christ. Drawing from John Zizioulas and Irenaeus, Georgia Masters Keightley offers a perspective on humanity's priesthood that can transcend both of these drawbacks. While we must recognize that it is through Christ that this cosmic Eucharist is perfected and offered, by virtue of the incarnation "human beings are pivotal."<sup>65</sup> Two factors are essential to consider here. First, Irenaeus saw humankind's initial creation out of the dust of the earth—the very stuff of

65. Keightley, "Creation's Priests," 312.

creation—as patterned on the prototype of the incarnate Son.<sup>66</sup> Hence, the story of humanity is intimately tied to the concrete reality of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Even when considering the cosmic Christ, we do not lose our economic moorings. The incarnation does not become a concept that is true of generic humanity, as it threatens to in Bulgakov. Second, though, Irenaeus's doctrine of recapitulation allows us to see that

while [recapitulation] signifies a re-beginning of the human race whereby Christ reverses the process begun by Adam, the bishop emphasizes that in redeeming human beings, God did not abandon his creation. On the contrary, human beings are pivotal in this because it is in and through the graced activity of the baptized that Christ's creative energy becomes effective and is made to extend throughout the earth. As individuals grow into the image of Christ, so too does creation move towards its own perfection. For Irenaeus, the Church is not so much a social entity as it is a dynamic process. That is, ecclesial reality is best understood as a progressive movement through time and space from Easter to the Last Judgement when finally Christ's Lordship over the earth will be fully instituted and to which the members of the Church contribute.<sup>67</sup>

Because Christ is very God and very Man, it is indeed humanity who fulfills the cosmos's priestly ministry so that God can be all in all. But because Christ is seen not as humanity *in toto*, full stop, but rather the head of humanity, there is a genuine participation in Christ of actual human beings. This provides the antidote to Barth's weak point, while also grounding all redemption in the concrete work of Jesus.

Baptism orders human life, and in so doing, the created order toward its fulfillment in Christ. It is in this way that Bulgakov's conception of the cosmic Christ and Barth's insistence on the concrete Jesus of Nazareth meet. And it is in this way that humanity is given a role in creation's consummation—a role neither separate from nor supplementary to Jesus Christ's unique role, but rather subordinate to and participatory in it. In that way, Christian ecology is able to take on its character as truly and distinctly Christian.

66. *Ibid.*, 310.

67. *Ibid.*, 312.



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