



The Doctrine of the Trinity and Christian Environmental Action

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Scholars in the past have suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity might serve as a useful model for a distinctively Christian approach to ecology. David T. Williams, for example, writes that Christians might relate to the natural environment “in a way parallel to the relationships within the Trinity.”¹ This approach has obvious similarities to other theologians’, such as Jürgen Moltmann’s, attempt to employ the doctrine of the Trinity as a model for the correct formation of the Church or of human societies.² Although I commend such thinkers for their insistence on the importance of this ancient doctrine for Christian theology and in their attempt to make it relevant to contemporary discussions, I do wonder what kind of relevance this doctrine needs to have.³ Thomas Aquinas, for example, states that humanity has been granted knowledge of the Trinity for two reasons. First, “it was necessary for the right idea of creation;” second, “and chiefly, that we may think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race, accomplished by the Incarnate Son, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit” (*ST.I. 32.1 ad 3*).⁴ In this way, Thomas understands the doctrine to be most relevant for human relationship with God rather than for human interactions with one another or the natural environment. Along these lines, I will argue that with regard to the environment the doctrine of the Trinity is most useful not for speculating some ecological model based on the immanent life of the

¹ David T. Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18 (2000), p. 149.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press LTD, 1981).

³ Kilby argues that this doctrine did not arise out of a need to organize human or ecclesial societies, but rather to explain certain theological ideas. “The doctrine of the Trinity arose in order to affirm certain things about the divinity of Christ, and secondarily, of the Spirit, and it arose against a background assumption that God is one.” Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 957 (2000), pp. 442–43.

⁴ All references to Thomas’s *ST* come from the *Summa Theologica*, Second and Revised Ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), available online at <http://www.op.org/summa>.

Trinity but rather for Christians' participation in the triune God's economic work towards Creation.

Aware of the great ecological problems facing the world today, Williams wonders how best to motivate Christian action to reverse humanity's damaging impact on the planet.⁵ He states several possible Christian responses to humanity's proper relationship with the natural world; these include an understanding of God as the divine Creator of the earth and the idea of Sabbath. Yet, he wonders how distinctively Christian these responses are. These ideas constitute aspects of Christian theology, but they are also quite amenable to other world religions. Williams then looks briefly to the incarnation as an example of God's great concern for the Creation. Yet, because belief in the deity of Christ instigated the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Williams claims that this incarnational way of thinking can be taken a stage further. Thus, he finds in the doctrine of the Trinity itself the ultimate model for a Christian understanding of ecology.⁶

Although Williams's concern is legitimate, his solution is problematic. As with any social model based on the Trinity, the effect of speaking this way poses the troubling paradox of separating the social entity from God as a mere reflection.⁷ Thus, by positing the doctrine of the Trinity as an ecological model, humans and the rest of the natural order, in their relationship to each other, are mistakenly separated from their relationships to their Creator. Once the model has been established, creatures can then conceivably coexist without relationship to their triune Creator. According to Thomas Aquinas's teaching, on the other hand, all created beings are related primarily to God.

For Thomas, Giles Emery notes, "all things are dealt with in holy teaching in terms of God, either because they are God himself or because they are relative to him as their origin and end."⁸ Thus, all theological thinking, even about ecology, must have God as its focal point rather than humanity or the environment. Christian thinking that takes the Trinity as a model but focuses on intra-human or intra-ecological relationships fails the object of true theology for it reduces theology to ecology or, in a reverse fashion, elevates ecology to theology.⁹ In this way, the doctrine of the Trinity tells Christians more about the relationship between the earth and God than between

⁵ Williams, "Trinitarian Ecology," p. 142.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷ John Behr, "The Trinitarian Being of The Church," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48.01 (2004), p. 68.

⁸ Giles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003), p. 132.

⁹ Here I am modifying Miroslav Volf's statement that a social model based on the doctrine of the Trinity "reduces theology to anthropology or, in a reverse fashion, elevates anthropology to theology." Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), p. 198.

the earth and humans. This doctrine states firstly, that the triune God is the free creator of the world. “The existence of the divine persons and the properties of these persons do not depend on creation or divine action in the world.”¹⁰ God created out of no lack or need because, as Trinity, the Father and the Son eternally share their Gift of Love, which is the Holy Spirit. In this sense, nothing outside this triune life is necessary. Thus, any relationship between the world and God is solely at the divine prerogative. Secondly, the doctrine of the Trinity elucidates the manner in which God renews or redeems the created order. “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). Accordingly, any Christian action that works toward the healing of the world is only a participation in the cosmic restoration that the triune God has already initiated.

Trinitarian Traces

Throughout the Church’s history, theologians have looked for marks or traces of the triune God in creation. Williams briefly alludes to two of these attempts, namely Tertullian’s examples of the tree and river and Augustine’s example of the human mind. Following Karl Barth, Williams then rightly states that even if it is valid to use the nature of the world to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity, it is incorrect to deduce the doctrine from the natural world.¹¹ Theologians such as Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas, however, do not simply use the marks or traces of the Trinity that they find in nature to deduce either the doctrine of the Trinity itself or a trinitarian model for correct human-environment relations. Rather, these theologians employ them as examples to illustrate the inner life of the divine Trinity and aid in humanity’s knowledge of God that is given by revelation.

For example, in describing the tree and river Tertullian offers an illustration or analogy to help explain his idea that the Son proceeds from the Father yet is not separated from the Father. “God brought forth the Word,” he writes, “as a root brings forth the ground shoot, and a spring the river.”¹² He continues, “the Spirit is third with God and [the] Son, as the fruit out of the shoot is third from the root, and the irrigation canal out of the river is third from the spring.”¹³ Tertullian does not offer these examples of threeness in nature as proof of the reality of the doctrine of the Trinity, but merely as

¹⁰ Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 131.

¹¹ Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” p. 149.

¹² Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean Liber*, trans. Ernest Evans, (London: S.P.C.K, 1948), p. 139.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

illustrations the idea of a trinity. Nor does he use them as indicators of correct ecological behavior. The threeness found in a spring, river, and irrigation canal does not, for instance, indicate that the correct ecological relationship of humans to springs and rivers is the building of irrigation canals.

Similarly, Augustine admits that the divine Trinity “as a thing in itself is quite different from the image of the trinity in another thing.”¹⁴ Thus, in looking for a trinitarian image in the human mind Augustine seeks not a proof of the existence of God as Trinity or its mirror copy but a discovery of the way in which humanity has been created in the triune image of God. He furthermore discovers that this mental image is not an image that humans hold in isolation from God. Augustine does not postulate from the doctrine of the Trinity a model for how the human mind should work. Instead, he finds the image of the Trinity in “the mind which *is being renewed in the recognition of God according to the image of him who created* (Col 3:10) man to his own image, and which thus achieves wisdom in the contemplation of things eternal.”¹⁵ In this way, the doctrine of the Trinity defines a relationship and knowledge of God rather than a model. “To the memory, sight, and love of this supreme trinity, in order to recollect it, see it, and enjoy it, he [the human] should refer every ounce and particle of his life,” writes Augustine¹⁶ Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity for Augustine, like for Thomas, serves to show humanity the One in whom their salvation lies, not how they should relate to each other or the environment.

Thomas Aquinas also finds “traces” of the triune Creator in creatures. Thomas’s traces, however, are not the equivalent of a model. A model would suggest that because humans are creatures they are likely to “relate to that [created] order in a way parallel to the relationships within the Trinity.”¹⁷ In this way, the doctrine of the Trinity is used to draw out a correct pattern of behavior. Thomas, rather, uses this doctrine to explain the *existence* of creatures. “The processions of the [divine] persons are in some way the cause and type of creation,” he explains (*ST.I.45.7 ad 3*). This corresponds to his first reason that humanity has been given knowledge of the Trinity – for the right idea of creation. He is drawing on the Augustinian idea that the immanent processions of the Trinity are the cause of the economic actions of the divine persons. To understand how Thomas uses his idea of trinitarian traces in Creation, we must first look at the manner in which God as Trinity creates.

¹⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New York City Press, 1991), p. 428.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 399. Italics original.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

¹⁷ Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” p. 149.

While the three divine Persons are a single Creator, Thomas appropriates different aspects of creation to each Person. Each Person contributes to the common act of creation through their respective modes of being. “To the Father is appropriated power,” because he neither receives the divine essence nor the power to create from another (*ST.I.45.6*). In this way, the Father’s contribution conforms to his immanent personal mode of being, which, Emery notes, “is to be the Source, the Principle without principle from which proceed the Son and Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ To the Son, Aquinas appropriates “wisdom” – the mediate cause or that through which the intellect acts. Aquinas bases this distinction on John 1:3: “Through him all things were made.” The Son has the same creative power, yet the Son receives it from the Father. Thus, the Word acts with regard to his personal mode of being, “which is to be in relation to the Father who speaks him.”¹⁹

“To the Holy Ghost is appropriated goodness,” to which belongs both quickening and government (*ST.I.45.6 ad 2*). By “quickenning,” Thomas means that the Spirit gives life to that which the Father creates through the Son. By “judgment,” he indicates that the Spirit brings creation to its proper end. Once again, Aquinas argues, the Spirit contributes in this manner because of the “common notion of the appropriation of the essential attributes” (45.6 ad 2). The essential attribute of the third Person of the Trinity “is to proceed [from the Father and the Son] by mode of will or by mode of love.”²⁰ Therefore, as the dynamic and active love of the Father and the Son, the Spirit appropriately quickens and governs creation. Although each trinitarian Person shares in the singular act of creation, Aquinas demonstrates through the different appropriations that the one effect is made possible through three unique contributions.

Because the trinitarian God is the source of all creatures, Thomas concludes, “In all creatures there is found a trace of the Trinity” (*ST.I.45.7*). All creatures, even humans, display in themselves these traces. The reason for this, he claims, is that “every effect in some degree represents its cause.” Thus, creatures, an effect of God’s creative act, display to some degree their trinitarian cause. Although rational creatures represent their cause to a higher degree than irrational creatures by way of image, all creatures represent the Trinity to the degree of traces. In this way, Thomas sees in creatures themselves indications that “the processions of the [divine] persons are in some way the cause and type of creation” (45.7 ad 3).

¹⁸ Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

There are three divine Persons and likewise three traces. As a creature is a created substance, it demonstrates that it owes its existence to a prior cause or principle. In this way, it “shows the Person of the Father, Who is the ‘principle from no principle’” (*ST.I.45.7*). By the fact that it has “form and species,” a creature displays traces of the Son. Using the metaphor of a craftsman, Thomas sees the Father’s creative power as given form through the divine Wisdom. A creature lastly displays traces of the Holy Spirit in that it “has a certain relation of order” (*ST.I.45.7*). In other words, it has relation to others, namely God and other creatures. Quite fittingly, Thomas appropriates this relational aspect of creatures to the divine Gift and Love. This order “points to the maker’s love by reason of which he directs the effects to a good end” (*ST.I.93.6*). In this way, Thomas’s use of the traces integrates creatures’ trinitarian creation with their same trinitarian end, or final goal. The immanent life of the divine Trinity produces the economic work of creation and the trinitarian handiwork in creation is displayed in that creatures exist, have form, and relate. The immanent trinitarian life does not, however, model how creatures are to exist, have form, or relate.

A Critique

I will briefly critique an example of the way the modeling approach uses the doctrine of the Trinity to further demonstrate the problematic nature of this line of thinking: Christians, so the argument goes, should protect biodiversity because God, as triune, is in a sense “diverse.”²¹ However, the immanent divine life cannot be so simply paralleled on earth. In the godhead, the Father is the source of the common divinity of the Son and the Spirit. Yet, in creation, there exists no creaturely source for the common materiality of all other creatures. Rather, the existence of creatures comes from the Father, through the wisdom of the Son, in the quickening power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the natural order cannot relate to itself in a manner similar to the immanent Trinity. The natural environment always finds its origin and final goal in something completely outside itself.

A stronger case may be made for the goodness of ecological diversity by appealing instead to other concepts within Christian theology, such as the notion of divine unity and simplicity, or to Christian worship. With regard to the first, Thomas teaches that God is not a composition of parts but is absolutely simple - God’s essence is not different from God’s existence. “It is clear,” he asserts, “that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple . . . Nothing composite can be predicated of any single one of its parts” (*ST.I.2.7*). As an

²¹ Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” p. 152.

example of this idea, Thomas says that no single part of the human body constitutes the human body as such, nor does any member of the foot comprise the foot. “Thus, in every composite there is something which is not itself. . . . And so, since God is . . . absolute being, He can be in no way composite.” In relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, this idea of God’s simplicity means that we cannot claim that the Holy Spirit is not God in the same way that we might say the toe is not the foot. Each divine person is fully God, yet there are not three gods.

This idea is important for Creation in that,

[God] is said to have made all things through His goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things. Now it is necessary that God’s goodness, which in itself is one and undivided, should be manifested in many ways in His creation; because creatures in themselves cannot attain to the simplicity of God. Thus, it is for the completion of the universe that there are required different grades of being (*ST.I.23.5 ad 3*).

God’s creation does not mirror the triune life of its creator as a model, but it does *reflect* the *goodness* of God. Because of the created, material nature of the universe, God’s goodness is manifested through diversity rather than uniformity or singleness. “The perfections of created goodness cannot be found in one simple thing, but in many things” (*ST.I.2.7 ad 2*).²² No matter how lofty or important humanity may think itself to be, humans alone cannot reflect the divine goodness. Accordingly, Christians should protect the diversity of nature not because there is a diversity of three divine persons but because only a diverse world can truly display the goodness of its single creator. Thus, we can see that rather than being tempted to argue for the goodness of biodiversity on the grounds that God, as triune, is somehow “diverse”, a stronger argument may be made on the grounds that God is One.

Gregory of Nazianzus also failed to see the goodness of diversity in nature arising out of some “diversity” within the godhead. For Gregory, the complexity and diversity he saw in nature was beneficial for the sense of awe it strikes in human hearts that leads them to an admiration of the divine power and glory. Gregory commends his audience to contemplate with wonder on the various birds, insects, plants, rivers, and mountains of the earth. “These things,” he claims, “are no less worthy of admiration in respect of their mutual relations

²² “Because the similitude of this [divine] goodness could be impressed more perfectly in creation only if there was a diversity and a plurality of things, there had to be a plurality of forms which constitute different species.” Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 173.

than when considered separately.”²³ The diversity of creatures and their mutual relations serve to draw human admiration towards “the majestic working of God” so that we “may at any rate know God by his benefits.”²⁴ The sheer vastness and beauty of the natural world struck Gregory in such a way that he was compelled to confess the goodness of its divine creator. In this way, protecting biological diversity can be viewed as an important aspect of Christian worship.

Willis Jenkins finds a similar idea in Thomas. “Christians should want biodiversity protected simply in order to be encouraged and inflamed by goodness, to know how better to clothe God’s name in worship and prayer.”²⁵ Aquinas states that our knowledge of other creatures can aid us in our naming and praise of God (*ST* I.13.1). Thus, Willis concludes, “if we find ourselves left with only the names derived from things made in our own image, the artifices of our own technology, we have little but our own narrow band of excellences (and those distorted by a host of sins) by which to praise God.”²⁶ Accordingly, Christians should be wary of the modern preference for monocultures in industrial agriculture and trade.²⁷ These examples demonstrate two ways Christians can find motivation to care for the natural environment without having to appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine, however, does prove helpful by showing us what this care might look like from a Christian perspective. In other words, trinitarian theology provides the *how* rather than the *why* of Christian environmental action.²⁸

A Way Forward

Miroslav Volf, criticizing ecclesial models based on the immanent life of the Trinity, writes, “It does not seem that the conceptualization

²³ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Second Theological Oration – On God*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, in *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), p. 155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2009), p. 131.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Blanchette relates this idea to Thomas’s notion of the perfection of the universe: For the universe, as for a house or the human body, “perfection of completion would be lacking if all parts were the same and served the same function.” Blanchette, *Perfection of the Universe*, p. 124.

²⁷ Speaking of animal agriculture, Edward Price notes that the “tendency to breed and subsist on but a few preferred and competitive species” is a questionable practice, but one that fits “into current patterns of trade and [has] clearly understood market value.” Edward O. Price, *Animal Domestication and Behavior* (New York: CABI Pub., 2002), p. 6.

²⁸ Along these lines, Colin Gunton claims that the various creatures in the natural world are gifts of the God the Spirit that the question humans should ask with regard to our actions toward them is, “Does this offer to God the creator the sacrifice of praise of the perfected creation?” Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 231.

process proceeds simply in a straight line from above (Trinity) to below (church and society) and that social reality is shaped in this way.”²⁹ A similar statement could be made about the relationship between the trinitarian doctrine and a Christian approach to ecology. The link between the two is not imitation but participation. Scripture contains many passages about humanity’s relationship to the earth. Paul, for example, states:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for creation was subjected to futility . . . in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now (Rom. 8:19–22).

Humanity’s role in the environment is not one simply of protecting and preserving but of healing and liberating. Similar to Thomas Aquinas, Lesslie Newbigin states that “all things have been created that they may be summed up in Christ the Son . . . All creation has this as its goal.”³⁰ Thus, one cannot reflect on a Christian understanding of ecology without taking into account the creation’s eschatological goal in Christ. In this way, Christians can work towards the healing of the earth while still awaiting its final, eschatological renewal.

A Christian approach to ecology converges with the doctrine of the Trinity in that it is into and by the power of the triune God that the heavens and the earth are being renewed. It is also in this triune power that Christians are invited to participate in the healing and renewing of creation. Knowledge of the immanent trinitarian life is important in as much as the eternal processions of the Son and Holy Spirit provide the basis for their temporal, economic missions into which Christians participate. In this way, renewal comes about through the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit in ways that reflect their processions. The Father brings about the creation’s promised freedom by sending the Son.³¹ In the power of the Spirit, the Church then participates in the Son’s saving mission that is enacted for all Creation through Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection. Thus, Christian environmental action will appear trinitarian in its participation in Christ’s economic mission rather than as a model of the immanent trinitarian relationships.

²⁹ Miroslav Volf, “After Our Likeness,” p. 194.

³⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub., 1988), p. 83.

³¹ John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 70.

Participation in the Son's Mission

The Son's mission restores humanity's broken relationships with God, one another, and with the natural environment. "Just as the fall of the 'first man Adam' had implications for the whole cosmos, so too does the salvation effected by the 'last man' Christ," writes Michael Northcott.³² The continuing "groaning" of Creation only makes sense, he claims, in light of the suffering and sacrifice of Christ (Romans 8:18–19).³³ Moreover, as Oliver O'Donovan observes, the reality of Christ's resurrection proves that God does not view the created order as "a lost cause."³⁴ It is Christ's resurrection that assures and initiates the possibility of a renewed natural world and a renewed relationship of humanity to that world. The resurrection reminds us that the Christian hope is not a gnostic desire for redemption *from* the world but rather a redemption *of* the world.³⁵ In the light of Christ's saving mission, human dominion takes the form of loving service rather than selfish, exploitation of the natural environment.³⁶

Thus, Christian imitation of Christ's mission will affirm the goodness of the natural environment not because it is a reflection of the divine trinitarian life, but because it is valued by God. The Father answers the groans of creation by giving the Son; likewise, the source of Christian stewardship of the natural environment is our own self-giving.³⁷ This can be expressed in prophetic critiques of idolatries, both political and economic, that promote the exploitation of the environment as well as in special care for those parts of nature that have been diminished or threatened by irresponsible human action.³⁸ Yet, these actions will be done not merely for the sake of the need but as acts of worship; they will give glory to the Father in the same way that Christ's actions were done to the glory of the Father. After their last supper, Jesus promised his disciples, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). In this way, both Jesus' actions and Christians' actions preformed in his name are done primarily for the glory of the Father.

³² Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 203.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³⁴ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p. 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "If dominion is defined for Christians by Jesus, then we cannot avoid the sacrificial element in the imaging of God into which, as Jesus' 'body,' we are being incorporated." Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (New York: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), p. 195.

³⁷ Calvin DeWitt, "Epilogue" in *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?*, ed. Calvin DeWitt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

Christ's life and ministry were also empowered by the Holy Spirit. "The birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way," Matthew reports, "His mother Mary . . . was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18). Peter, in *Acts*, also claims that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; [and] he went about doing good and healing" (10:38a). Thus, the Father receives glory from the Spirit empowered ministry of Christ that achieves the healing and restoration of sinners and creation.

Empowered by the Spirit's Mission

The Spirit empowers the healing mission of the Son and Christian participation in that mission is similarly empowered. Along these lines, Newbigin writes, "The Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of the Son, is given as a foretaste of that consummation [of all creation in Christ], as the witness to it, and as the guide of the Church on the road towards it."³⁹ These three aspects of the Spirit's mission (as foretaste, witness, and guide) have particular relevance for Christian environmental action. The Spirit is given first to Christians as a foretaste. Christ has begun the restoration of creation, but this restoration awaits its completion in the eschaton. Presently, however, the Holy Spirit grants glimpses of the future hope of creation. Newbigin continues: "to be possessed by the Spirit will mean to share in the groaning and travailing of the whole creation which waits for its freedom, but it will mean that the groaning and travailing are filled with hope and a sense of direction."⁴⁰ With environmental crises as immense as anthropogenic global climate change, human action for the good of the environment can appear daunting. Yet, if it is empowered by the Spirit it will not lead to despair, for the Spirit fills this action with a living hope. The Nicene Creed states that the Holy Spirit is "the Lord, the giver of life." In the same way that the Spirit gives life to the creation that is brought about from the Father through the Son, the Spirit gives life to Christian participation in the Son's saving mission to the glory of the Father.

The Holy Spirit, according to Newbigin, is also given as witness and guide. In Jesus' farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus promises that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Spirit reminds the Church of Christ's life and the meaning of his death and resurrection. In this way, Newbigin is correct in saying that the Spirit will fill Christians with hope and a sense of direction. The Spirit bears witness and reminds Christians of Christ's saving mission toward creation. As

³⁹ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, p. 83.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

the Spirit reminds them of the resurrection, Christians realize the foundation for their hope that Christ's mission will be completed. The Spirit, furthermore, is guide in that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). In a similar manner, no Christian can participate in Christ's restoration of creation except in the Spirit. Christians trust in the Spirit in order to know the will of the Father that is enacted for creation through the Son.

In conclusion, Christian environmental action should be trinitarian; yet it is only so as an act of worship and participation in the work of the trinitarian God toward Creation rather than as a model based on the inner trinitarian life. It is the will of the Father that all of Creation be redeemed and brought into eschatological communion with God. It is through the Son's mission that the Father's will is incarnated and accomplished. The mission of the Holy Spirit, then, empowers that of the Son's. Christian action is then done in reverse order. Christians heal Creation *in* the power of the Holy Spirit, *through* Christ who is the Church's head and initiator of Creation's restoration, *to* the glory of the Father.

As the devastating effects of centuries of human misuse of the earth become more and more apparent, there is great need for humanity to respond and reverse its abuses. As members of the body of Christ and sharers in his saving mission, Christians especially have a mandate to work towards the healing of the earth. Yet, the proper way forward is not to model our actions on the inner life of the Trinity but to reclaim our roles as participants in God's economic mission. The modeling approach incorrectly assumes that because we might use elements from the natural environment to illustrate the concept of trinity, "it is also valid to work in the opposite direction" and deduce from the doctrine of the Trinity what the correct operation of the world should be.⁴¹ Simply because Tertullian, or Augustine, or any number of Christian theologians may have used natural phenomena to help illustrate the perplexing concept of trinity, does not necessarily mean that speculation in the opposite direction is likewise legitimate. The Church and the environment are in active relationship with God, not set apart as a replica of the divine life. As members of the earth community, Christians experience its groaning and travail. As members of the body of Christ, Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to imitate Christ and heal the wounds caused by sin, to the glory of the Father. Thus, a trinitarian approach to ecology is not a model of the immanent trinitarian life but rather a participation in the economic trinitarian missions for the healing and renewing of all creation.

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⁴¹ Williams, "Trinitarian Ecology," p. 149.