

Practical Divinization in Ecologically Threatened Times

Nanette M. Walsh, MFA, OSB Cam. Oblate*

Union Theological Seminary

Practical divinization describes the practice of connecting our spiritual and psychological development to conscious participation with the earth. This essay investigates the concept of Christian *divinization* in dialogue with Jung's conception of individuation. Historically, the idea of divinization emerged from new concepts of personhood synthesized in the 1st century CE. Examining the ancient roots of personhood illuminates concepts of self and divinization within a contemporary theological and psychological context. Annis Pratt's analysis of the archetype of "green-world epiphany," evident in much of the literature written by women in the past three centuries, exemplifies the ethos inherent in practical divinization. A new interpretation of Matthew's "Worry Not Gospel" imagines a female orientation of the text and further confirms the need for an embodied and fully participatory wisdom in relation to the earth. Practical divinization issues forth a call to action and a cause for hope in the face of ecological crisis.

What is *divinization* and what practical meaning can it hold for us in the face of our ecological crisis?

The word *divinization*, though strange to contemporary ears, is often mistaken for *divination*. Both terms are derived from the Latin root *divinus*, connoting the quality of being godlike and sacred ("Divinus" Glosbe). *Divination* is the ancient art of foretelling the future by the aid of supernatural powers ("Divination"). However, *divinization* describes the act, process, or instance of investing with divine character ("Divinization"); in Greek Orthodoxy, it is synonymous with *deification*, or theosis (θέωσις), a transformative process aimed at the union of the human person with the divine. In this essay we will investigate the concept of Christian *divinization* in dialogue with Jung's conception of *individuation* in order to incorporate a psychological perspective in the construction of a more *integral ecology*: a new movement that currently includes ecological science, anthropology and theology.¹

* nwalsh@riversideinitiative.com

Both the concepts of *individuation* and *divinization*ⁱⁱ describe a practical *process of becoming*, inseparable from their telic end. Christian *divinization*, born out of classical and early Byzantine notions of personhood, affirms the union of spirit and matter.ⁱⁱⁱ Jung represented his psychology as an empirical science; defending his concept of individuation against the charges of Gnosticism,^{iv} he asserted that “[i]n reality . . . *individuation* is an expression of that biological process . . . by which every living thing becomes what it was destined to become from the beginning” (CW 11, par. 460). We will consider this *process of becoming* through a feminist lens that advocates for the full humanity of female and male, opposes in all forms the paradigm of male dominance and female subordination, and calls for the full participation of humankind (Lipsett and Tribble 6). A truly integral ecology can do no less.

I do not have the calling^v to justify or explain the history of the Christian church; my aim is to be in dialogue with and practically reclaim vital and spiritual life forces, female and male, that were present in early Christianity in order to envision more comprehensively the psychological dimensions of a constructive integral ecology.

Divinization’s Ancient Roots

Divinization is derived from the early Christian idea of personhood. In pre-Christian systems of cosmology, the concept of person was a nonsubstantive, accidental category emphasizing cyclical schemes of coming to being and coming into dissolution (McGuckin 2). The idea of the person became substantive when early christological doctrine adopted the Neoplatonic argument for *hypostasis*, characterized philosophically as the substance or essential nature of an individual (“Hypostasis”). This substantive, Christian concept of person heralded a new and refined semantic for one of the greatest advances in thought about human consciousness that history records. “*Prosopon* became *Hypostasis* *Prosopon*, the Greek word for ‘person’ does not mean person in our sense of discrete subjective consciousness, it simply refers to an existent specimen: *to idion* *Prosopon* was itself a cliché of singularity, not a mark of individuation” (McGuckin 2).

J. A. McGuckin suggests that this new Christian *personalism* was a synthesis of philosophical thought in pre-Christian times. It arose out of a combination of Platonist theories of divine intelligible reality, Aristotelian thought on *energeia* and *bios* (McGuckin 3–5), and Plotinus’ concept of the awareness of divine potency as the giving of identity’s core in the act of communion (9).

The concept of divinization was thus born out of philosophical reflection on the new notion of person and a Neoplatonic concept of individuation, which was the “process of inward focus for connection to the intelligible realities that signal the mystical

connection of the individual to the Supreme Nous” (McGuckin 3). *Nous*, defined as mind or reason, such as an intelligent purposive principle of the world or the divine reason regarded in Neo-Platonism as the first emanation of God (“Nous”), appears throughout the New Testament.^{vi} *Logos*, similar but different to *nous* in Greek philosophy, is the controlling principle in the universe, or the divine wisdom manifest in the creation, government, and redemption of the world. John Scottus Eriugena, the 9th-century Celtic mystic philosopher, translator, theologian and poet, through whose efforts “the mystical Neoplatonism of the Eastern Church entered the Latin West” (Conway et al.), identified *Logos* as one aspect of nature, the totality of which includes both God and creation.^{vii}

The prologue of the gospel of John lays out creation motifs related to the incarnation of divine *Logos* in classic Christian poetry. Highly symbolic and hymn-like, it attests to the preexistence of Jesus Christ as *Logos* incarnating as the eternal Word, as life and light, and revealing God the Creator to everyone.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life. And this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world And the word was made flesh and made his dwelling among us. . . . From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace (John 1.1–16)

Logos became substantively incarnate and manifested in individuals as *Spirit* through the unfolding of their life force in the course of life’s choices, activities, and attainments. An incarnate *spiritual personhood* consequently became fundamental to the transformational process of divinization (McGuckin 3).

Christian wisdom,^{viii} often associated with the early monastic’s pursuit of the *via negativa*,^{ix} in practice also finds a home in more relational paths, old and new. As sociologist of religion Rodney Stark explains, an essential component of the formation of early Christianity in Palestine was a kinship bound by faith and exemplified by gratuitous acts of kindness (Stark 106–119). Bruno Barnhart illuminates the history of the Western wisdom tradition in *The Future of Wisdom: Towards a Rebirth of Sapiential Christianity*. In his book we find wisdom as the native theological language of the early patristic and monastic way of life and see its decline in the 12th-century, as a more purely rational mode of “scholasticism” became the dominant mode of theology (13). We track wisdom’s near disappearance until new perspectives emerge in 20th-century dialogues, including “a profound interaction with the Asian traditions, a continuing modern

Western personalism, and the historical moment of post-modernity and globalization,” and we find that wisdom consciousness is appearing yet again today, “vigorously present in multiple forms . . . hardly recognized and therefore hardly aware of itself” (2,1). Barnhart’s book heralds the recovery of wisdom centered in a participatory knowing that is a matter not only of epistemology but also of life (185); however, before further addressing contemporary wisdom consciousness, we will return to its ancient roots.

Irenaeus (circa 130–200), 2nd-century bishop of Lyons, was the primary Christian theologian to develop a comprehensive analysis of spiritual personhood. His theology synthesizes ancient biblical theology and heralded our sublime dignity and exaltation as human persons, a fullness constituted by our interior relation to God. In Irenaeus’s words, God “harmonizes the human race to the symphony of salvation” (4.14.2). His theology has a synthetic, pluralistic approach and is fundamentally and radically rooted in the phenomenon of the human being.

No other utterance of Irenaeus communicates his anthropological vision better than the famous and oft-repeated assertion, “For the Glory of God is a man who is alive; and the life of man is the vision of God” (4.20.8). We might prefer to speak in more gender-neutral terms, that is, the glory of God is the *human* fully alive, and the life of *humanity* is the vision of God.

Aiming to maintain peace within the diversity of religious thought and practice of his day, Irenaeus affirmed the unitive, open, and inclusive message of the scripture:

“For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God” (5.6.1). By doing so, he discredited the Gnostic system of the elites: Gnostic preaching purported secret, mystical knowledge (intertwining mythology, philosophy, and magic) for an elite group of “knowers,” while Irenaeus’s teaching empowered all and embraced plurality. He also rejected the Gnostic belief of separation between spirit and flesh. For Irenaeus, all human persons were included in participation in divine glory. In *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Norman Russell highlights that immortality was not just for the spiritual elite. The rank and file of the Church could attain immortality by virtue of Incarnation (105).

Irenaeus’s theology was central to the early Eastern Church’s vision of Christianity and its vision of deification. In Greek Orthodoxy, deification was based in divine humanity as it appeared in Jesus Christ and was communicated to other persons by his death and resurrection and by the imparting of the divine spirit through baptism. McGuckin in his lecture entitled “Irenaeus of Lyon (130–200): Re-imagining the Cosmos from the Perspective of the Oppressed” stresses that Irenaeus’s anthropology refused to allow an ultimate divide between spirit and flesh, between world^x and

holiness, between God and humanity. The flesh (and by extension, the world) was a fundamentally true “sacrament of the divine presence.” With a theology so based on unity, McGuckin suggests that Irenaeus laid down the “basis for a theology of ecology: the world as a graced sacrament” (McGuckin “Irenaeus” 11).

For Irenaeus, Jesus disrupted what it means to be human with this paradoxical vision: Jesus was both the authentic incarnation of the Divine who remains Divine and therefore absolute, and the personification of the “infinite significance of the finite individual human,” who remains finite in a common destiny with human beings in general (Muller et al. 405). History and culture, therefore, are an inseparable part of Christian participation with the eternal absolute. This paradoxical and exceptional unity is both at the core of Irenaeus’s sublime anthropology and fundamental to the practice of Christian divinization.

Irenaeus’s teachings articulated the dignity of human beings through their relation to the divine. Indeed, following Irenaeus, McGuckin addresses early Christian notions of the self to propose that human dignity emerges as the focus of Christian culture, the locus of some of the highest religious and intellectual ideals, and the stronghold for social and political freedom (McGuckin “Classical & Byzantine Christian Notions” 1).

Divinization in a Contemporary Theological Context

The contemporary concept of self, defined philosophically as “spiritual subjectivity” (McGuckin “Classical & Byzantine Christian Notions” 1), not only carries universal importance regarding how we think and talk about the human person but also resides at the core of our moral and societal values in the West: the concept of self is fundamentally linked to the concept of the human person and is thus fundamental to human rights issues. Because early Christians first promulgated the philosophical notion of personhood as substantive to the world, theologically sophisticated discourse “might [now] be in a position to repair the notion in a time when it is clearly being damaged by those who either do not understand its universality, and dismiss the rights of persons, or those who do not seem to understand its function as a term of communion, and so elevate rights of persons as an agenda separated from broader terms of moral culture”(3).

To understand the full identity of personhood in our world today, we will consider our relational dimensions to the divine and each other, past and present. Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman introduce *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* offering the term “*participatory turn*” to propose that “individuals and communities have an integral and irreducible role in bringing forth ontologically rich religious worlds” (Ferrer and Sherman 13, back cover). Reviewing the book, Richard Tarnas admits that the *participatory turn* applied to various global traditions, ancient and

contemporary, defies the “constraints of the reductionisms inherent in so many conventional academic assumptions today,” and offers a new way to “enter back into direct engagement with the great mystery that religious study seeks to illuminate” (back cover). We will see that such a turn heralds the recovery of a wisdom centered in participation and opens our consciousness to the deeper and wider dimensions of participatory knowing.^{xi} From a Christian perspective, to be *in relation* to the divine is to partake of and participate in it.

Christopher Morris aptly terms the process of participatory knowing “integrated action.” In his lecture “Wisdom for a Life Worth Living” he cites the psychologist Christine Bates, “It is no longer meaningful . . . to see wisdom as a singular phenomenon . . . or as a body of knowledge . . . Now the notion of wisdom must incorporate a *process of arriving at a truth*, which fits the needs and context of individuals, a community, a nation, or a people” (Bates 411).

Celtic mystical theology draws from a unity consciousness rooted in the ancient traditions of the East. Divinization underpins the Eastern Orthodox Christian conception of transfigured humanity and society as communion (McGuckin “Classical & Byzantine Christian Notions” 3). A Celtic Christian sense of divine communion with the earth is expressed in Christopher Bamford’s introduction to Eriugena’s 8th-century commentary on the prologue to John’s gospel,^{xii} wherein he places Eriugena’s poetics in context:

Wind and water, sunlight and cloud, dream and vision, bird and animal, thought and silence ebb and flow like so many veils before the Face of God . . . where the wall between worlds is transparent and permeable; and where the presence of the invisible worlds of soul and spirit are so close, so insistent in their reality and unthreatening in their love, that one sets aside one’s defenses and enters into heart-to-heart communion with the cosmos and oneself. (Bamford 21)

Eriugena’s thinking owes a debt to the aphophatic discourses of Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius). John Phillip Newell citing Eriugena in “The Healing of Creation” affirms that the gift of nature is the gift of “being” while the gift of grace is the gift of “well being.” Newell further proposes that “[a]t the heart of our being is the image of God, and thus the wisdom of God, the creativity of God, the passions of God, the longing of God . . . [Grace] is given to restore us to the core of our being and to free us from the unnaturalness of what we are doing to one another and to the earth” (9–15).

As we learned in our earlier investigation of the ancient roots of divinization, Eriugena also owes a debt to the Orthodox character of pre-Roman Celtic Christianity. Michael Austin explores *theosis* and its importance for the understanding and practice of the Christian moral and spiritual life, affirming that it goes beyond deep communion

where the faithful perceive God's thoughts: "it also includes moral and spiritual growth"; he further states that it "involves the perception, progressive adoption, and ultimately the application of God's *strong evaluations*, which partially constitute our normative identity as children of God"^{xiii} (Austin 179). One example of a *strong evaluation* would be to perceive the conflict inherent in serving God and pursuing wealth as a main pursuit in life by meditating on Matthew 6.24: "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Matt.6.24). Through such a perception, the faithful come to share God's view of the value and proper place of material wealth in their lives (179).

Many parts of Western culture appear to have lost sight of the intellectual premises and practices of the ancient traditions from which the philosophy of personhood and divine communion first arose. However, a new awakening of the human person in all its dimensions arose in Christianity in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II). Pope John XXIII opened the council in 1962 to address the Catholic Church's relation to the modern world. Theologians gathered for three years to seek a more accurate understanding of scripture and to affirm the church's universal call to holiness.

Karl Rahner, one of the great architects of Vatican II, asserted that all theology is anthropology.^{xiv} Thus, he provided a radical departure point from the theological scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas, which has influenced Christian thought and self-understanding since the 12th-century. Rahner maintained that the fulfillment of human existence consists of receiving God's self-communication and that the human being is actually *constituted* by this divine self-communication (Barnhart Second Simplicity 92).

If all theology is anthropology, a full understanding of the human person in all its dimensions is crucial to current theological understanding and ethical action. Christian self-understanding must also now include a deeper engagement with the earth. One of its most vocal proponents of this affirmation was Thomas Berry. Berry, an outspoken advocate for the environment, offered a profound understanding of the emergent universe and the vital importance of human participation in the Earth community. He said, "[T]he divine communicates to us primarily through the languages of the natural world. Not to hear the natural world is not to hear the divine" (145). He further asserted that while "the human is derivative, the Earth is primary. Earth must be the primary concern of every human institution, profession, program and activity" ("The Determining Features"). For Berry, humans are but a subset of a larger integral Earth community of life (Angyal 35–44). We can imagine that he might have built on Irenaeus's anthropology to affirm that the Glory of God encompasses more than humanity alone; and we can imagine that, for Berry, humankind's full participation in

an Earth community would be the Glory of God and that the Earth community's full participation with humankind would be the vision of God.

Central to contemporary Catholic theology is the imperative to "renew and strengthen that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying" (Consiglio 114-115).^{xv} More recently, a new depth and breadth of theological commitment to the Earth community was heralded in Pope Francis's latest encyclical, *Laudato Si': Care for Our Common Home*. He dedicates the entire encyclical to our ecological crisis and clearly affirms the meeting of the human and the divine in all creation in his opening comments: "It is our humble conviction that the divine and human meet in the slightest detail . . . and speck of dust, in the seamless garment of God's creation" (11).^{xvi}

Divinization from a Psychological Perspective

The concept of personhood, integrally linked to the process of divinization, bears noteworthy resemblance to the Jungian archetype of self and the process of individuation.

Jung's archetype of self signifies the God image within that powers the individual toward telic fullness and imbues life with meaning and purpose. Both individuation and divinization characterize an embodied, substantive concept of the human person that is driven towards fulfillment in wholeness, which is personal and collective, sacred and mundane. Jung defines the self as "the psychic totality of the individual" (CW 11 par. 232). He says that "[i]ndividuation is the life in God" (CW 18 par. 1624) and that it is the "archetype of self in the soul of every man that responded to the Christian message, with the result that the concrete Rabbi Jesus was rapidly assimilated by the constellated archetype. In this way Christ realized the idea of the self" (CW 11 par. 231).

Psychological self-knowledge, founded on the charge to *know thyself*^{xvii} is fundamental to the concept of individuation. Demaris Wehr, in *Jung & Feminism*, says that individuation is at the core of analytical psychology and that "Jung conceives this core process as the achievement of distance from compulsions, or 'inner voices', at the same time that he advocates 'claiming' and acknowledging previously unknown parts of ourselves" (50). She also affirms that "Jung's emphasis on the reality of our deepest spiritual questions, as well as on the experiential and nonrational, presents an insistent corrective to Western society's materialism" (126).

For Bates, wisdom, not mere knowledge, is a "process of arriving at the truth" (411). We can imagine this "process" theologically as reconciliation and personal synthesis. Wisdom is an integrated action that involves an intermingling of inner and outer

experiences, and an interpenetration of subject and object that moves the knowing deeper and deeper (Morris 3). In light of this larger and more dynamic understanding of wisdom, we realize that participatory knowing is fundamental to Christian self-understanding, and the process of divinization.

Jung, in the period after the second World War, conscious of the possibility of nuclear disaster, writes in a letter to Elined Kotschnig:

Man's relation to God probably has to undergo a certain important change [T]he fulfilling of the divine will in us will be our form of worship and commerce with God Man has already received so much knowledge that he can destroy his own planet. Let us hope that God's good spirit will guide him in his decisions, because it will depend upon man's decision whether God's creation will continue. Nothing shows more drastically than this possibility how much of the divine power has come within the reach of man (Quotable Jung 205).

Today, we can imagine that Jung would likely also be conscious of the many ecological threats to the planet and our fundamental responsibility to it and each other:

He [man] is even the outer fringe of the self; the self is like a crowd, therefore, being oneself, one is also like many. One expresses a totality. One cannot individuate without being with other human beings . . . being an individual is always a link in a chain; it is not an absolutely detached situation, in itself only, with no connection outside But as a matter of fact . . . you realize you are connected with other human beings, how little you can exist without being related, without responsibilities and duties and the relation of other people to yourself (Nietzche's Zarathustra 102).

Jung sees God as wholly immanent and asserts that faith is of our own making; however, divinization affirms God's transcendence and immanence. Nonetheless, Jung warns that when speaking of the experience of the self, one is tempted to use the conception of God to express it but that "it is better not to, because the self has the peculiar quality of being specific yet universal So we should reserve that term God for a remote deity that is supposed to be the *absolute unity of all singularities*" (Nietzche's Zarathustra 294; emphasis added).

Conscious participation with that *absolute unity of all singularities* through ethical involvement in the world, along with care for the earth, may be a reasonable definition of practical divinization as well as a means to "know thyself."^{xviii} Such conscious participation is at once personally and collectively transformative because it offers a cause for hope and a call to action in the face of our ecological crisis.

Susan Rowland, in *The Ecocritical Psyche*, asks why there is so little protest about climate change and the extinction of species, and why people do not seem to care. She suggests that the “effect of evolutionary science has been to uproot us from evolutionary interconnectedness” (137). She posits that we have lost an intrinsic ability to “make order out of things in nature” (137). The term *folk taxonomy* describes this instinctual ability that embeds us in nature, and “its residual presence is necessary to know, for example, that we eat bread and not blankets” (138). This instinctive presence is so alien to a dominant patriarchal consciousness that it is invisible and unknowable to many. It appears that our lost connection to the natural world can explain the problems inherent in Christian divinization as well as psychoanalytic theory; the fundamental flaw is an over-focus upon an individual soul or psyche at the expense of the interconnectedness of this soul/psyche to the whole of nature.

Berry suggests a new age in human culture that reclaims our lost connection to the earth and that is dependent on the identification of woman with the earth and its creativity:

[T]he emergence of the new age of human culture will necessarily be an age dominated by the symbol *woman*. Woman and Earth are inseparable. The fate of one is the fate of the other. This association is given in such a variety of cultural developments throughout the world in differing historical periods that it is hardly possible to disassociate the two. Earth consciousness, woman consciousness; these two go together (“The Spirituality of the Earth”).

Wehr suggests that Jungians should step back from Jung’s valuing of what he calls *feminine* and “allow the ‘feminine’ to arise out of women’s experience” (125). If we examine stories of female empowerment and transformation, a new mode of divinization can be embraced, one based on participatory knowing. Historically, women’s literature consistently expresses liberation as occurring through a reciprocal sense of interconnection to the whole of nature. In *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction*, Annis Pratt and her coauthors examine more than 300 novels by both major and minor women writers over three centuries. She argues that emergent archetypes found in women’s fiction subvert traditional stereotypes that restrict the full, personal development of women. She maintains that unlike female stereotypes, these archetypes, being fluid and dynamic, empower the female personality to grow. They are both futuristic and rooted in women’s history (135). Pratt asserts that the principal archetype recurring in women’s fiction involves a deep, instinctive, felt sense of nature, as well as one’s place and value within it.

Pratt calls this archetype the *green-world epiphany*. She begins her overview of women's literature by invoking the river nymph Daphne. According to Greek mythology, Daphne resists the advances of Apollo by turning herself into a tree. In women's fiction, the green-world epiphany has various expressions in female narratives, and they all communicate the liberating potential of realizing one's rootedness in the natural world. Pratt cites numerous novels in which the green-world epiphany, unique to female spiritual initiation, is crucial to the recurrent narrative of rebirth and transformation. She concludes that for three centuries women novelists have "given us maps of the patriarchal battlefield and of the landscape of our ruined culture. And they have resurrected for our use codes and symbols of our potential power" (178). In the face of ecological crisis, feminist interpretations of divinization inspire practices based on full participation with nature and the world around us. To experience a green-world epiphany confirms a woman's value as a creature of the earth in felt participation with its multiplicity, diversity, and abundance. Pratt's elucidation of the green-world epiphany, fundamental to female transformation and the resurrection of women's power, seems essential to transcending the gender polarities that are so destructive to human life.

A Feminist Reading of the "Worry Not Gospel"

In a new reading of the biblical passage known as the "Worry Not Gospel" (Matt. 6. 25–34) in the Sermon on the Mount, we can imagine that Jesus is speaking to the women who are gathered in the crowd and that his discourse offers transformational initiatives, which call for practical divinization through participatory knowing in relation to the earth. The Sermon, reported to have happened around 30 CE in the low hills near the Sea of Galilee, includes The Beatitudes that begin it: "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are those who mourn . . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth . . ." Along with the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount contains Jesus's version of *The Golden Rule* and an ultra-pious intensification of the Ten Commandments. Along with the high moral imperatives of the discourse, the "Worry Not Gospel" also offers instruction on how to manage anxiety that might accompany the challenge for us to lead an increasingly righteous life, as exemplified by chapter 6, verse 34: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Today's trouble is more than enough for today; however, with the ecological crisis at hand, tomorrow is a real concern. The gospel affirms the wise practice of refraining from useless worry. However, the traditional imperative to "worry not" has led some to trivialize the very real concerns for our future and the future of the planet and to embrace

a dangerous fantasy that the Father will take care of us. The gospel, thus trivialized, appears to ignore the real ecological issues facing us at the present and would seem to have outlived its usefulness.

However, the triadic structure of the text provides an alternate and potentially more useful meaning in the face of ecological crisis. To investigate an alternative meaning we need to include verse 24, that is, the verse immediately preceding the traditional beginning of the pericope at verse 25, and to highlight a crucial parallelism within it:

(Matt 6.24) “You cannot serve God and wealth.

(25) “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink

(26) “Look to the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them

(28) “And why do you worry about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

(29) “yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these

(31) “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’

(33) But strive first for the kingdom of God . . . , and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Here at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is a parallelism that we can imagine exhibits a female orientation of the text. Use of a parallelism in scripture typically connotes emphasis related to the meaning of the text. What special meaning might this parallelism hold for us?

Sandra M. Schneiders advocates the employment of the “paschal imagination”—imagination structured by the paschal mystery of Jesus—to read and interpret scripture anew. She asserts that while she does not want to condone or perpetuate the marginalization or oppression of women in the church, she does think that “women’s unique experience as Christians, structured as it is by the paschal mystery of Jesus, in which life eternal issues from the death inflicted on him by human evil, instructs us always to stir the ashes of human violence in the expectation that the phoenix of new life will rise before our eyes.”

In “Tradition Makers/Tradition Shapers: Women of the Matthean Tradition” Elaine Wainwright affirms the necessity of a “paschal imagination” for all Christians in order to undertake the task of the ongoing telling and retelling of their ancient story. She says that since women were often resistant to, as well as compliant with, patriarchal structures (381), texts may well carry traces of their resistance. Therefore it is important

to determine ways in which theological imagination can take account of these realities. For example, Wainwright draws on the creative imagination to listen to the voice of Justa, the Canaanite woman who sought healing from Jesus for her daughter.

“I am Justa, the woman from the coast of Syro-Phoenicia, whom the Matthean community called Canaanites. Now why did they do that to me? It seems that some in the community did all in their power to marginalize me in their telling of my story. I was fortunate that there were strong women leaders for whom I was a foresister. They struggled with others in their communities in the shaping of my story. Their struggle is still visible in the story which was finally incorporated into the community’s gospel. My story also captures another struggle—that between myself and Jesus as I sought healing for my daughter” (384).

Ulrike Bechmann, in her essay “The Woman of Jericho: Dramatization as Feminist Hermeneutics” asserts that “we must engage in critical hermeneutics . . . that recognize the complexity of the Bible What is needed is differentiated access to the biblical texts” (183). The full participation of both the female and male imagination seems crucial to the vital continuity and collective memory of faith communities. Revitalized communities, aligned in protest and grief with the poor, the oppressed, and the exploited are needed to enter more fully into participation with the earth at this time. Bechmann re-imagines the voice of the victim in the well-known story of the conquering of Jericho (Josh. 6.1–21).

“Hello. You don’t know me . . . my name is Nachla—I’m one of the forgotten ones I want to meet you. You are going with Joshua? Well, still the wall of Jericho is there and the gate is open I’ll show you around a bit if you like.” After touring the reader through her nice city she concludes “Tomorrow, when the sun rises, the wall will fall down. The city will be burnt So go now, and tomorrow, when the walls come down, we will meet again—and then you will kill me.” (185)

Seeing through the eyes of the other we are availed of new and surprisingly potent perspectives. Jung, in order to open up new perspectives in a similarly surprising way, advocated the employment of “active imagination”—the opening of oneself to the unconscious and giving free rein to fantasy, while at the same time maintaining an active, attentive, conscious point of view (“Active imagination” *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*). Furthermore, he says that “[b]y means of ‘active imagination’ we are put in a position of advantage. . . .” (CW 8 par. 414).

The employment of the creative or active or paschal imagination can liberate and empower us in surprising ways in order to reclaim and revitalize ancient texts such as the “Worry Not Gospel.” First let us further consider context in relation to the story at the time it was written: what to eat and drink was especially women’s concern, women’s work. A large part of a woman’s day was spent harvesting and preparing food, tasks crucial to the economic survival of families, many of which lived on small farms. Women were also dedicated to making clothes. “Wool working was the one household task that occupied the time of all but the wealthiest women” (Wordelman 217). It is not hard to imagine Jesus is speaking especially to the women in the crowd. Parallel to addressing their concerns for “what to eat,” “drink,” and “wear” Jesus further offers invitations to look to the “birds of the air” and observe the “lilies of the field.”

Before attempting to imagine further what special meaning this parallelism might be emphasizing, let us consider that women held prominent roles in the early church (Stark 121–136). Furthermore, the writers of the New Testament often employed metaphorical narrative to communicate something of what people actually experienced of the character and ministry of Jesus and the gospel messages he communicated (Borg and Wright 234–235). The Sermon on the Mount is most likely an imaginative account based on a collection of oral transmissions from eye-witnesses that combine many of Jesus’s teachings given in the hills of Capernum (4).

The “Worry Not Gospel” marks an evolutionary moment: the metaphorical nature of the Sermon, the use of imaginative narrative to communicate surprising new perspectives, the consequent imaginative possibilities for women, and the parallel invitations to participate in nature in order to transform women’s anxiety, together enable us to imagine that the “Worry Not Gospel” might be one of the earliest fictional expressions of the green-world epiphany in recorded history.

In order to investigate more deeply the meaning of the gospel’s parallelism and the wisdom it may offer in face of our ecological crisis, we will now consider the overall literary genre of the Sermon. Raymond Brown asserts that the Sermon on the Mount is a “masterpiece of ethical and religious teaching. It is the first, and the longest, of the five discourses in Matthew’s gospel, and it has overarching parallels with the five books of the Law of Moses” (178).

The clause, “You have heard it said . . . but I say to you” appears multiple times in the chapter that precedes the “Worry Not Gospel.” For example:

“You have heard it said to those in ancient times,

‘You shall not murder; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment”
(Matt. 5.21a–c)

Each time, the phrase “you have heard it said” is followed by a reference to one of the commandments in the Hebrew Bible. Brown affirms that, in the Sermon, Jesus dares to speak with more moral authority than Moses, and while some may read these verses as urging us to look more deeply into the roots of our behavior, Brown suggests that these verses communicate an ethical teaching of idealized proportions (179).

The gospel’s concerns also appear in the extra-canonical wisdom teachings of the Gospel of Thomas. The concerns (i.e., what to eat, drink, and wear) appear in the 36th saying of both the Greek fragments of The Gospel of Thomas and the Coptic text of the Nag Hammadi. Thomas offers further counsel: “[You are far] better than the [lilies] which [neither] card nor [spin] . . .” (Oxyrhynchus).

However, to glean the fullest meaning from the text, we need to reconsider it in the transformational context of the discourses given on the hillside near Capernaum. Glen Stassen offers a practically hopeful interpretation of following the Matthean Jesus teachings. He outlines 14 triadic structures in the Sermon of Mount that reveal an overall aim at clarification, transformation, and deliverance. Each triad begins with the first member conveying traditional righteousness. For example, in our triad the first member declares, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” The second member indicates a vicious cycle of worry: “Therefore, I tell you do not worry” The third member offers transformational initiatives that aim to deliver the hearer from the vicious cycle of the second member: “Look to the birds of the air”

The emphasis on the third member of the triad aims to help us see the way of deliverance in the teachings, their basis in grace, and their participation in the breakthrough of the Divine (Stassen 269). This triad links the cycle of worry to multiple invitations for positive transformation: look to the birds, observe the lilies, and seek first the kingdom of God. The final imperative “to seek the kingdom of God” is the climactic initiative of the gospel. In Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke, *malkutha dashmaya*, the kingdom of God, translates to “home for the Universe, that which makes ‘oneness’ knowable.” “Home for the universe” is an all-encompassing invitation for participatory knowing that accords with our imagining a female orientation of the text. Of import, the initiatives do not support traditional admonitions *not to worry* or give license to quit the hard work of change. They are rather crucial and timely invitations to act by participating in the divine. It is reasonable to suggest that this wisdom teaching is aimed at transformation, female and male, not just mere comfort.

With the invitations that form our parallelism, to observe the “birds of the air” and “lilies of the field,” the hearer is invited to look to the birds, predominantly for what they do not do (sow, reap, or gather into barns). Even if sowing, reaping and gathering into barns were men’s work, women still contributed to working on the land. We are also told

to observe the lilies and what they do not do (card or spin), carding and spinning, women's work. The invitation to look to the birds and lilies seems to offer more than comfort, care, and counsel; we can imagine Jesus speaking to women about women's work to imply a Divinity that is aligned with them and their work.

Jung cautions against positive inflation when he says that to "carry a god within oneself is practically the same as being God oneself" and that "it is a guarantee of happiness, of power and even of omnipotence" (CW 18 par. 1624). While there is cause for concern regarding positive inflation, women's experience of religious marginalization, exclusion, and subordination has affected women's ministry and their sense of themselves in relation to God and the world. We can imagine that women's carrying around a bit more of the Godhead might helpfully counter their long-restricted access to it and the ramifications that that restricted access has had for female individuation.

The transformational initiatives combined with an imaginative female orientation of the "Worry Not Gospel" may enable a profound participation in divine wisdom for women who have heretofore felt excluded from hermeneutical participation in scripture. An imaginative approach aimed at transformation versus comfort may also benefit men who wish to open up a more normative point of view and who are interested in reading the gospel anew.

A Call for Practical Divinization

In the face of our current ecological disaster it seems crucial that we consciously connect our spiritual and psychological development to caring for Earth; this essay has offered the term *practical divinization* to describe such a conscious effort and has suggested that the contemporary wisdom practice of participatory knowing is a vital agent in practical divinization.

Our "home in the universe" is fundamentally inclusive. Imagining a female orientation of the text in the "Worry Not Gospel" gives new power to the invitation for women and men to observe nature deeply and enter into a participatory knowing with God. While particularly potent for Christian women, the transformative initiative in the gospel is open to all humankind. To participate in divine wisdom is to know the Creator's gratuitous care for creation. To know the Creator's gratuitous care for creation is to participate in a profound care, as well as grief, for our home in the universe.

Participation in the archetype of the *green-world epiphany* and a new reading of the "Worry Not Gospel" offer imaginative liberation for women and men from alienated norms of productivity as signs of worth, and offer further healing for Christian women through affirmation of their equal value and participation with earth and in the divine.

Domination, subordination, and “split” evaluation of women^{xix} are patriarchy’s daily fare. Full participation in the archetype of the green-world epiphany in all its abundance, diversity, multiplicity, and inclusivity can be powerfully liberating from internalized “inner voices” that distort a woman’s value. Such participation levels the playing field of female and male experience and poses a critical threat to any dominant position or voice, even Jung’s.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’: Care for Our Common Home*, asserts that the “Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (50). If we are to avoid further ecological catastrophe we *must* learn to care for nature as the Divine cares for nature. As Barnhart maintains, “If we learn this one lesson in the course of our life, we have learned the essential lesson, the wisdom of God: To give as God gives, to give without asking anything in return” (Barnhart “Ash Wednesday” 3). Likewise, Berry challenges us to create a new sense of what it is to be human (Berry *Dream* 42). He asserts that “our sense of who we are and what our role is must begin where the universe begins” (*Great Work* 162). A new sense of who we are and who we might become can be gleaned from a new interpretation of scripture, affording greater transformational power to its revelations and lessons in practical divinization. The participation of all humankind in divine wisdom is practical divinization; it is a call to action, and cause for hope, in our ecologically threatened times.

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Notes

ⁱ This new movement also includes economics, and is fully articulated by Pope Francis in chapter 4 of *Laudato Si'*: *Care for Our Common Home* (93).

ⁱⁱ Here *divinization* is referenced as it relates to the Christian tradition, and *individuation* as it relates to Jung's conception of it. Use of these terms hereafter will assume these characterizations unless otherwise stated.

ⁱⁱⁱ As Bishop Kalistos Ware suggests, Christians were the true materialists. See "Microcosm and Mediator" in *The Orthodox Way* (62–64).

^{iv} According to Jung, Gnosticism was seen as "full of 'exotic' and 'far-fetched' proofs" (CW 11, para. 460). As will be discussed later in this essay, the splitting of spirit and matter was fundamental to the Gnostic system.

^v As described by James Hillman in *The Soul's Code* (1–20).

^{vi} See Rom. 7.23, 12.2; 1 Cor. 14. 14–19; Eph. 4.17–23; Thes. 2.2; Rev. 17.9.

^{vii} From Eruigena's *Periphyseon*: "Nature is to be understood as what is real in the widest sense . . . Nature includes both God and creation and has *four divisions*: nature which creates and is not create (God), nature which creates and is created (the Primordial Causes [the *Logos* or Word of God]), nature which is created and does not create (the Created Temporal Effects), and nature which is neither created nor creates (Non-Being [or God as Supreme End / Mergence point])" (Conway et al.).

^{viii} Discussion of Christian wisdom here will not include biblical sophiology. As Rosemary Radford Reuther points out, while some women are eager to adopt Sophia as a powerful female religious symbol, many feminists believe that female religious symbols for God and collective humanity in Judaism and Christianity were "created by men to empower men, and to keep women in their place." (247).

^{ix} David Henderson applies the lens of apophasis to analytical psychology. (1–10).

^x World and earth are not necessarily used the same way in Latin texts. Irenaeus did not have the ecological concerns we do today; however, his theology provides the groundwork for *integral theology*.

^{xi} Bruno Barnhart further describes four "turns" in which a new unfolding of Christian sapiential theology takes place. See *The Future of Wisdom: Towards a Rebirth of Sapiential Christianity*, "Four Movements" (18–19).

^{xii} See "Introduction to the Second Edition." *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity* (20–21).

^{xiii} See Charles Taylor's discussion of the concept of *strong evaluations* in *Sources of the Self*: "Strong evaluations . . . involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged." (4).

^{xiv} While Ludwig Feurbach believed that humans make God in their own image and thus was the first to suggest that all anthropology is theology, Rahner's affirmation transforms Feurbach's assertion by affirming that humans are made in God's image; that is, not all anthropology is theology but all theology is anthropology.

^{xv} Cyprian Consiglio cites Pope Benedict XVI's Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 2, 2010 in *Spirit, Soul, Body: Toward an Integral Christian Spirituality*. He notes that while Benedict will be remembered for his stalwart defense of orthodox teaching against relativism and for the scandals and mismanagement in the Vatican, he also placed environmentalism right at the heart of our modern ethical challenges and was the "greenest" of popes. (114–115). Note that Consiglio's book was published prior to Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si': Care for our Common Home*.

^{xvi} Francis is referencing the closing remarks of the Halki Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2012.

^{xvii} See chapter 2 in Hillman's *Healing Fiction* "A Pandemonium of Images: Jung's Contribution to Know Thyself" (53–63 and 75–81).

^{xviii} Jung cites Hippolytus who insists on "the future deification of the believer: 'You have become a God, you will be a companion of god, and co-heir in Christ.' He says of the deification: 'That is 'Know thyself.'" Cf. "The Song of the Moth" in *Symbols of Transformation* (CW 5 par. 132).

^{xix} Wehr defines "split" evaluations as "'bad' or 'good', as in the well-known Madonna/whore split"; furthermore, she says that "women internalize these polarized 'split' images, experiencing themselves in exaggerated terms as 'good' or 'bad,' 'wholly responsible' or 'not responsible at all'" (124).

^{xx} Unless otherwise stated, the source for all definitions is the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-WebsterDictionary.com, 2017, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/divination.