

**The Macondoization of the World:
Global Environmental Governance and Christian Ethics**

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This essay establishes an agenda for research at the intersection of global environmental governance and Christian ethics. It begins by reflecting on the Gulf oil spill of 2010 and eco-critical approaches to Gabriel Garcia Marquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude as a sort of shorthand for the challenges inherent in global environmental governance. Noting the rising importance of religious imaginaries to environmental governance, it draws upon theological anthropology and theological ethics to describe the origins, moral meaning, and challenges of global environmental governance according to notions of tragedy and responsibility, pointing toward the possibility of a "cruciform imaginary" according to which global environmental governance may be organized.

“Endowed with means that had been reserved for Divine Providence in former times, they changed the pattern of the rains, accelerated the cycle of the harvests, and moved the river from where it had always been....”

--Gabriel Garcia Marquez¹

Tragical Realism

In mid-April 2010, the oilrig *Deepwater Horizon*, a fifth-generation, ultra-deepwater, dynamically positioned, and column-stabilized drilling rig—in other words, one possessing the most powerful and sophisticated drilling technologies in the world—suffered a massive explosion, killing eleven rig workers and injuring sixteen others. *Deepwater Horizon* had been drilling in Mississippi Canyon Block 252, an oil and gas prospect in the Gulf of Mexico, code-named “the Macondo Prospect.” Code-names without relationship to identifiable geographical or geological information are routinely assigned to drilling areas in order to preserve secrecy and facilitate casual reference.² In any given year, these names may be meaningless references to heavenly bodies, beverages, superheroes, or cartoon characters. In this case, however, the accident itself lends unintentional and ironic meaning to the code name: “Macondo” referred to a fictional Colombian town at the center of a 1967 novel by Nobel Prize winning Colombian author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose novels and short stories are notable for magical realism, the invasion of “highly detailed, realistic settings... by something too strange to believe.”³ The well had been assigned this name because BP had donated the naming rights to the United Way, which had auctioned them off to a Colombian-American organization that chose the name

¹ Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 229.

² Peter Maass, "What Happened at the Macondo Well?" *New York Review of Books* (September 29, 2011).

³ Matthew C. Strecher, “Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Volume 25, Number 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 263-298, 267.

“Macondo” in order to honor Marquez.⁴ There is no way the organization could have known how terribly fitting the name would be.

Marquez’s novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,⁵ chronicles the rise and fall of Macondo, tracing six generations of its founding family, the Buendias. Few novels share the scope of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. As Gene H. Bell-Villada writes, “To approach *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not just to read a novel, but to stumble upon a vast cultural territory and glimpse a dizzying array of people and patterns, horizons and meanings.”⁶ The book’s “bewilderingly high rate of incident” and non-linear storyline make a detailed summary of Macondo’s history challenging even for the most astute literary scholar and impossible in this space.⁷ Tracing the town’s history from its founding to its demise, Marquez explores such perennial themes as time, solitude, and subjectivity. For our purposes, though, it is important to note that the fictional town’s downfall is preceded by the construction and operation of a foreign-owned banana plantation. The plantation’s owners aim both to provide food and to accumulate wealth by exploiting local natural resources. All sorts of techniques are employed to this end, as Marquez satirizes, “Yankee technology and its more grotesque gigantisms in the elaborate

⁴ National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, *Macondo: The Gulf Oil Disaster (Chief Counsel's Report 2011)*, 2011b), 25, en3., citing an interview with David Sims of BP.

⁵ Other authors have noted the connection between Marquez’ Macondo and the Macondo Prospect. See, for example, Joel Achenbach, *A Hole at the Bottom of the Sea: The Race to Kill the BP Oil Gusher* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011); Maass, “What Happened at the Macondo Well?”; National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, *Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling (Report to the President)*, 2011; National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, *Macondo: The Gulf Oil Disaster (Chief Counsel's Report 2011)*; Loren Steffy, *Drowning in Oil: BP and the Reckless Pursuit of Profit* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011). These authors note that both the fictional town and the well came to bad ends or that the fictional town, like the oil industry, was forever stuck in “an age of magic” in which no one really understands how things work. None of these sources associate Marquez’ town, and other allusions to Macondo, with the problem of tragedy and risk that is so clearly evident in the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

⁶ Gene H. Bell-Villada, “The History of Macondo,” in *Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude: Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009).

⁷ *Ibid.*

hardware applied... to a harmless banana.”⁸ As Bell-Villada notes, the plantation evokes “the rise of giant corporations and their technology, *both miraculous and destructive*.”⁹ Technologies employed at the Macondo banana plantation were as powerful as means that had hitherto been “reserved for Divine Providence,”¹⁰ employed by a corporation of globetrotting gringos.

But the gringos’ fortune was Macondo’s misfortune. The banana plantation was marked by inhumane working conditions, just as was the United Fruit Company plantation on which Marquez loosely based his fictional estate. And as in the historical case of the United Fruit Company plantation in Cienega, Colombia, tensions surrounding labor conditions led to an explosive social atmosphere, a conspiracy between the corporation and the government, and the brutal massacre of plantation workers.¹¹ In Macondo, workers invited by the plantation owners to discuss the conditions of employment walked into a trap, and three thousand of them were gunned down by government forces. The corpses filled 200 train cars, which carried them away to the sea and to oblivion. The town was then systematically purged of the memory of the incident in a mysterious conspiracy that preceded the apocalyptic end of the town in a whirlwind or hurricane, an environmental catastrophe of biblical proportions.

The episode of the banana plantation—its founding, its labor disputes, and its ignominious massacre—is in one respect just one among many moments in Macondo’s story of “fascination with scientific inventions... as sources of wealth, power, control,”¹² which reveal a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 229.

¹¹ Eduardo Posada-Carbo, "Fiction as History: The Bananeras and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (1998), 395-414. Note that Marquez himself indicates that the three thousand massacred in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* exceed the number murdered at Cienega.

¹² Brian Conniff, "The Dark Side of Magical Realism: Science, Oppression, and Apocalypse in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," in *Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

frantic but futile desire to “grasp and manage”¹³ the world. In another sense, it is the decisive moment in the town’s history. Marquez describes the events surrounding the massacre as “the events that would deal Macondo its fatal blow.”¹⁴ The efforts of the plantation owners to control nature and to produce both profit and food were the source of the town’s eventual downfall.

While Marquez’s Macondo was destroyed by a whirlwind at the end of the novel, it lives on through echo, allusion, and irony. The 1974 Roman Polanski film, *Chinatown*, for example, includes an allusion to Macondo. Jake Gittes, a private investigator, spies upon Hollis Mulwray in the “El Macondo Apartments”—a reference revealed to be intentional by Production Director, Richard Sylbert¹⁵—suggesting parallels between Marquez’s Macondo and a Los Angeles community intent upon transcending its own limitations and exploiting its resources to the fullest.¹⁶ The plot of *Chinatown* turns on the intentions of investors and engineers to make Los Angeles both wealthy and habitable by redirecting the Owens River. As with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, parts of *Chinatown* are loosely based upon a true story: the history of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which brought water to Los Angeles through a system of aqueducts and dams, an engineering feat unlike any that had been undertaken before.¹⁷ As

¹³ John Incladon, "Writing and Incest in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," in *Critical Perspectives on Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, eds. Bradley A. Shaw and Nora Vera-Godwin (Lincoln, Nebraska: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1986). For a sustained eco-critical approach to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, see Raymond Williams, "An Eco-Critical Reading of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, ed. Philip Swanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ursula K. Heise, "Local Rock and Global Plastic: World Ecology and the Experience of Place," *Comparative Literature Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004), 126-152.

¹⁴ Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 293.

¹⁵ Paul Iorio, "Interview with Richard Sylbert," <http://paulioriohome.blogspot.com/2007/04/go-to-wwwpauliorioblogspotcom.html>, 2012).

¹⁶ There are, of course, other thematic and incidental parallels between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Chinatown*, including drowning and incest. With regard to the latter, there may in fact be unexplored parallels with the *Deepwater Horizon* incident. The relationship between the petroleum industry and the United States Minerals Management Service has been described by some as an incestuous one. See, for example, "Editorial: Questions about the Gulf." *New York Times*, sec. A, May 30, 2010.

¹⁷ Catherine Mulholland, *William Mulholland and the Rise of Los Angeles* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002).

with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in the end of *Chinatown* the exploitation of scarce resources in Los Angeles proves to be a source of ruin and points to the downfall of the town itself. Like Macondo, the development of Los Angeles, including efforts to make it a more livable and wealthy place, results in the production of risk. Thus the name, “Macondo,” has come to symbolize unadulterated will to power, the vanity of the human condition apart from restrictions, and the calamities that often accompany enterprising, but overly ambitious, intentions to transcend natural limits.

Polanski’s echo of Marquez is matched by the *Deepwater Horizon*, lending Macondo fresh relevance through a realism more tragical than magical. Drilling a well in the Macondo Prospect, the *Deepwater Horizon* was exploring at a depth of 18,360 feet below sea level, more than three miles below the surface of the earth.¹⁸ This was supposedly a more or less safe endeavor, as the same rig had previously drilled the deepest recorded offshore oil well at a depth of over 35,000 feet below sea level.¹⁹ The giant machinery of the *Deepwater Horizon* was built by the Korean firm Hyundai Heavy Industries precisely for the purposes of harnessing hitherto inaccessible fields of oil in order to produce the energy required to make industrial and post-industrial lifestyles possible, concentrating wealth, power, and control while leveraging technology to lift many from conditions of poverty.

But on April 20, 2010, something went awry with the machinery of the *Deepwater Horizon*, causing a bubble of highly combustible methane gas to travel up the pipeline from the ocean floor to the rig platform, resulting in an explosion and a fire that engulfed and eventually

¹⁸ National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, *Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling (Report to the President)*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

sank the rig.²⁰ In an effort to maximize profits by cutting costs and corners—an inclination confirmed by investigators as common to the industry and to the corporations involved in the *Deepwater Horizon* incident—the team in charge of preventing the flow of methane gas from the well into the rig had done careless work. Further incompetence led to a misinterpretation of data that would have served as an early warning that the highly combustible gas was quickly rising to the surface.²¹ By the time anyone recognized the problem it was too late to prevent the disastrous explosion.²²

After the April explosion, oil gushed from the sea-floor well for almost ninety days; a trickle continued until the well was capped in September, almost six months after the spill began.²³ More than five million barrels of oil poured into the Gulf of Mexico in what White House energy advisor Carol Browner described as “the worst environmental disaster the U.S. has faced.”²⁴ As one might imagine, the ecological costs to the Gulf of Mexico were extraordinary. Thousands of animals perished, many more suffered and lived. In an interview with Rowan Jacobsen, Bill Finch, Director of Conservation for the Alabama Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, described the event as “merely the latest [event] in a hundred-year catastrophe along the Gulf Coast.”²⁵ In the same way that the massacre of workers in Marquez’s Macondo is one among many similar events in a 100-year history that led to the town’s downfall, and yet the most decisive, the *Deepwater Horizon* spill is one among many events in the Gulf’s 100-year environmental catastrophe, and yet perhaps the most telling.

²⁰ Ibid; National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, *Macondo: The Gulf Oil Disaster (Chief Counsel's Report 2011)*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Gulf of Mexico Leak the 'Worst US Environmental Disaster'." *BBC News*, 30 May 2010.

²⁵ Rowan Jacobsen, *Shadows on the Gulf: A Journey through our Last Great Wetland* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 8.

The human burdens of the disaster were also extraordinarily high. The economy of the gulf region suffered one of its worst summers ever, and the more immediate costs were even starker. Of the 126 people on board, eleven perished and more than a dozen others were injured. In the immediate aftermath, those present reported that “there’s guys burning and some guys missing limbs. It’s like a war zone.”²⁶ Of the dozens evacuated to shore, some reported that a security detail immediately drove them to a hotel where they were sequestered without access to lawyers, family members, or the media, and coerced into signing papers waiving their rights to file claims against Transocean, the multinational corporation that owned and operated the *Deepwater Horizon*.²⁷ If true, the parallels with Marquez’s *Macondo* may be even deeper than at first is apparent: just as the multinational agricultural corporation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* “[established] in solemn decrees that the [massacred] workers did not exist,”²⁸ *Deepwater Horizon* rig workers were pressured to fill in date, name, and address on pre-printed documents indicating, “I was not a witness to the incident requiring the evacuation and have no first hand or personal knowledge regarding the incident,” and “I was not injured as a result of the incident or evacuation.”²⁹ On paper, at least, the memories of those closest to the incident had been erased, which parallels memory of the incident in the world at large. The oil spill that followed the apocalyptic end of the *Deepwater Horizon* in a whirlwind of flame and charred flesh was covered extensively by every major media outlet in the world and resulted in the immediate stigmatization of Transocean, Halliburton, and BP. Consumer boycotts of BP pumping stations were matched by a government-mandated moratorium on offshore drilling. But the boycotts and the moratorium were a short-lived form of remembrance and resistance. They

²⁶ Joseph Shapiro, "Rig Survivors Felt Coerced to Sign Waivers," *All Things Considered*, 6 May 2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

²⁹ Shapiro, "Rig Survivors Felt Coerced to Sign Waivers."

soon gave way to business-as-usual, reflecting the presumption that these types of events have become incidental to contemporary pursuits of both wellbeing and profit.

The most striking parallel between these Macondos—Marquez’s, Polanski’s, and Transocean’s—is the systematic production of peril as incidental to the production of wealth, power, and control by technological means. Our efforts to “grasp and manage” the world, to produce, distribute, and consume goods, and to overcome scarcity, often result in calamity. Moreover, whether in the form of massacre (Marquez), murder (Polanski), and mayhem (Transocean) or in the transformation of the environment (all three Macondos), the mastery of nature for the purposes of enhancing welfare and producing wealth often entails the “production of unequal nature.”³⁰ Whether accidentally, incidentally, or purposefully, good and bad environments are produced and then distributed in ways that create inequality. Some live in the midst of relative environmental integrity, and some suffer under conditions of a disintegrating environment. In sustaining some lives and livelihoods, we imperil others.

These echoes of Macondo point to the emergence of what some have called “risk society.”³¹ The past three centuries have witnessed the accumulation of unprecedented levels of wealth and the production of unprecedented risk. These two phenomena are related. As German sociologist Ulrich Beck notes, “In advanced modernity the social production of wealth is *systematically* accompanied by the social production of risks.”³² The production and accumulation of wealth can be regarded as a function of power used to integrate and concentrate

³⁰ John Byrne, Leigh Glover and Cecilia Martinez, "The Production of Unequal Nature," in *Environmental Justice: Discourses in International Political Economy*, eds. John Byrne, Leigh Glover and Cecilia Martinez, Vol. 8 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 2002), 230-256.

³¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1992a). See also Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (New York: Polity, 2009); idem., *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy* (New York: Polity, 2006); idem., "From Industrial Society to the Risk Society: Questions of Survival, Social Structure, and Ecological Enlightenment," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 9, no. 1 (1992b), 97-123; and Anthony Giddens, "Risk and Responsibility," *Modern Law Review* 62, no. 1 (1999).

³² Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, 19.

goods. Beck suggests that risk is also produced and distributed by this exercise of power. The tools by which we have sustained industrial and post-industrial lifestyles are useful for avoiding scarcity and producing wealth, but they also produce previously unimaginable levels and types of risk. One need only examine transportation systems as an example. Devices and systems of modern transportation (the automobile, the train, the plane, and so on) are able to integrate goods that previously could not be had simultaneously (the ability to live in one place and work in another, the ability to transport medicine and food to those in need, and so on). But at the same time, while they integrate these goods, they produce additional and new risks—the costs of integrating these goods—and distribute them in peculiar ways.

Beck's argument flies in the face of suggestions that technological advances either are or produce unvarnished goods. Instead, the safer, more secure, and more prosperous we become through the employment of technological advances, the greater the scale and scope of the risks we create. But Beck's suggestion is that those who absorb the upsides and benefits of greater safety, security, and prosperity also distance themselves, either intentionally or incidentally, from the downsides and costs. As Beck notes, "the problems and conflicts relating to distribution [of resources and goods] in a society of scarcity overlap with the problems and conflicts that arise from the production, definition, and distribution of techno-scientifically produced risks."³³

Among the risks to which Beck and others point is the declining integrity and stability of many of the world's environments, along with attendant social effects. Urban environments, water resources, and biological diversity face dramatic and possibly irreversible change as the environmental burdens of late-modern lifestyles increasingly shift to fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities. Perhaps the most challenging environmental problem we face is

³³ Ibid.

anthropogenic climate change. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, human activities have increased the concentration of energy-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and reduced the capacity of the earth to sequester those gases in plant matter. Burning fossil fuels for transportation, cooking, heating, air conditioning, refrigeration of food and medicines, and other goods, along with extracting timber at unsustainable rates in order to have the wood necessary for construction, has increased the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and warmed the surface of the earth, energizing and changing climate in dangerous and possibly irreversible ways. The technological activities that cause climate change are, like those technologies applied to the harmless banana at the Macondo plantation, *both miraculous and destructive*; they both provide and portend, prophesying the end of human community in a whirlwind. Like the feats of engineering that make possible the settlement of Los Angeles in large numbers, they also tempt us to corruption and perversion of power. Like the moral and technological failures that marked the *Deepwater Horizon* catastrophe, they threaten to end our story in a sort of inferno.

Globalization, Environmental Governance, and the Rise of the Religious Imaginary

Climate change and other widespread environmental challenges represent the systematic production of peril on a global scale. Globalization, “the growing interdependence of cultures through emerging techno-economic and socio-cultural networks,”³⁴ has increased the scope and scale of risk, as well as the pace of its emergence.³⁵ Global dynamics, the processes connecting people and place at great distance from one another, increase the scope of risks associated with industrial and post-industrial lifestyles. It can no longer be assumed that actions undertaken in

³⁴ John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching and Todd Lewis, *Religion and Globalization: World Religions in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

³⁵ Beck, *World at Risk*; Beck, *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy*.

one part of the world only, or even primarily, affect that part of the world, or that the costs and benefits of actions, while they might accrue to different populations, accrue to different populations in the same place. Where once the benefits and costs of a given action were most likely to be borne within a single community, even if differentially within that community, those benefits and costs can now be separated—accidentally, incidentally, and purposefully—by great distances both in time and space. Global dynamics ensure that the costs and benefits of a given action can accrue to different populations in very different places or in different generations. Communities the world over must now absorb the risks associated with the exercise of human power in distant places, even when that power is not directed against communities at a distance; the same can be said of future generations.

Evoking Marquez, Polanski, and Transocean, globalization has created exceptional advantages and at the same time exceptional levels of vulnerability to forces both within and beyond the control of any given community. Today, globalization arguably leads not only to the famous “McDonaldization”³⁶ of the world, but also the “Macondoization” of the world. Marquez himself, in his 1982 Nobel Prize Lecture, suggested that Macondo is in many ways a microcosm of Latin America.³⁷ Indeed, in Latin America, some occasionally refer to their hometowns as “Macondos,” in order to emphasize parallels with Marquez’s fictional town. But Macondo is now truly a microcosm—the world represented in a tiny fictional city. We can all refer to our hometowns, and our planet, as “Macondo” now.

³⁶ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2008); George Ritzer and Elizabeth L. Malone, "Globalization Theory: Lessons from the Exportation of McDonaldization and the New Means of Consumption," *American Studies* 41 (2000).

³⁷ Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Solitude of Latin America* (Nobel Prize Lecture, December 8, 1982); Swedish Academy of Letters: The Permanent Secretary, *Press Release: The Nobel Prize for Literature 1982, Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, 1982.

But globalization has not only made possible the Macondoization of the world. It has also made possible global environmental governance, multi-scalar and multi-centric attempts to manage risk by unprecedented numbers and types of effectively authoritative—even if not formally authoritative—agents, including state and non-state actors at the local, national, regional, and global levels. For example, small groups of people in the UK enter into binding agreements with each other to reduce their burden upon the global environment and other human beings.³⁸ Far-flung municipalities agree to reduce emissions of climate-destabilizing greenhouse gases.³⁹ Delegates to international meetings now routinely gather to determine the chemistry of the atmosphere, to control global temperatures, and effectively to decide upon the fate of distant communities.⁴⁰ Our great physics experiment in the sky has been met by a number of governance experiments, each seeking to harness global dynamics for responsible action in environmental governance.⁴¹ Such actions, which would have been preposterous not long ago (Who would have thought that human beings would change the chemistry of the atmosphere and determine to that extent their experience of nature?), are acknowledgements of the increased capacity of human communities, however small, to shape future global outcomes and of an increased sense of responsibility even for environments, populations, and generations that are far off. They are efforts at the responsible exercise of power that is perhaps only possible by harnessing the same global dynamics that make so many people and places so vulnerable.

³⁸ Matthew Hoffmann, *Climate Governance at the Crossroads: Experimenting with a Global Response After Kyoto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Noah Toly, “Transnational Municipal Networks in Climate Politics: From Global Governance to Global Politics,” *Globalizations* 5, no. 3, 341-356.

⁴⁰ The range of actions undertaken to mitigate or adapt to climate change, and the scales at which such actions are undertaken, is explored in greatest detail in Hoffmann’s *Climate Governance at the Crossroads*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

These efforts at environmental governance entail their own particular reflexive challenges and reveal the shape of moral deliberation in environmental governance, in which the burden of power and responsibility demands that we weigh competing claims, measuring risk against risk, right against right, confronting moral dilemmas and tragic choices of extraordinary scale and scope. We now commonly measure gains for this generation against safeguards for future generations, luxuries for one community against the livelihoods of another, freedoms for some populations against the most basic needs of others, not to mention weighing of human against non-human welfare. Should people be free to pursue economic development in the most efficient manner while burdening themselves and others with environmental costs? Or should economic freedoms and development efforts be curtailed in order to preserve environmental integrity and public health? As Oran Young has argued, global environmental governance requires us to balance sustainability, efficiency, and equity without constraining human freedom more than is necessary.⁴² Currently, it is not possible to have all of these goods at the same time. These tradeoffs and tensions inhere in environmental governance. While we employ technical advances—in social systems as much as in machinery—to transcend tradeoffs and tensions that seem basic to human life—resource scarcity, for example—these same advances in many ways reshape, intensify, and distribute tradeoffs.

It is this divergence or disintegration of goods that is the key challenge of environmental governance. How do we compare goods and judge between goods? To do so, we must have some criterion that stands above them and by which we can take measure of alternatives and determine a responsible course of action. Discriminating between competing claims to the right requires the

⁴² Oran Young, *On Environmental Governance: Sustainability, Efficiency, Equity* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

identification of what Charles Taylor calls “hypergoods”: “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which [others] must be weighed, judged, decided about.”⁴³ Hypergoods are an expression of the capacity for judgment—the ability to judge one thing to be valuable above all others and the norming norm by which other things can be judged. The adoption and expression of hypergoods involves the articulation of values that can integrate goods and legitimate actions in a world where such decisions are made difficult by the divergence of goods.

Undertaking this work collectively requires the articulation of social imaginaries—constellations of values, institutions, laws, and symbols common to a social group. A social imaginary is “not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society... it tells us something about how we ought to live together in society.”⁴⁴ According to Cornelius Castoriadis, social imaginaries are “the laces which tie a society together and which define what, for a given society, is real,” shaping a collective approach to “living, seeing, and making [a society’s] existence.”⁴⁵ Social imaginaries are “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.”⁴⁶ Perhaps most importantly, social imaginaries provide “common understanding, which makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of

⁴³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 63.

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 10.

⁴⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, cited in John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 23-24.

⁴⁶ Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” 106.

legitimacy.”⁴⁷ In other words, social imaginaries help us to legitimate our decisions to produce, distribute, and consume certain goods in certain ways and to forego others. These reflexive moral challenges—the challenges of deciding how to choose between and integrate competing goods, how to legitimate those choices, and, specifically, how to do so collectively—much more than any technical problem, are at the core of global environmental governance. From this perspective, global environmental governance is clearly an arena for the assertion of various and sometimes competing visions of justice and the good world.⁴⁸

In the context of global environmental governance, rival claims of legitimacy and justice have typically emerged from various secular rationalities. Neo-classical economic thought—that branch of economics resting upon the notions of rational preference, utility maximization, independent action, and marginal value—has provided the resources for the predominant mode of discriminating between competing claims to the right by appealing to economic efficiency. Its commitment to efficiency—producing the greatest outputs with the fewest inputs—has grounded common understanding, common practices, and a shared sense of legitimacy when it comes to choosing between competing goods. The primacy of economic thought in this regard emerged in part because modern economic thought is essentially a response to the sorts of scarcity that characterize many environmental challenges. In fact, modern economic thought and modern environmental thought share common origins in their early concerns with the relationship between an exponentially increasing human population and a much more slowly growing

⁴⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2007). This collective undertaking is particularly challenging in the face of the presumption that individuals possess the capacity and responsibility to pass judgment. This puts collective choice in significant tension with individual choice—a tension that is worked out in many different, but often inarticulate and underspecified, ways.

⁴⁸ The notion of “the good world” as a driving force behind contemporary discourses, institutions, and practices and an object of academic analysis is here borrowed from Josh Yates. The idea, along with citizenship, was an organizing theme of a June 2012 conference at the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.

capacity for food production. Since then, modern economic thought has been the predominant approach to weighing alternatives for environmental action, and market-based mechanisms have been attractive solutions to problems of global environmental governance. Through efficiency, market-based solutions as techniques for dealing with environmental challenges have supposedly allowed for the integration and accumulation of goods by ensuring that we give up fewer goods in pursuit of our goals and therefore have more goods remaining in the end.

However, the sense of legitimacy surrounding the role of neo-classical economic thought in environmental decision making has eroded over the past three decades. Cost-benefit analysis and “discounting,” cornerstone practices of the economic evaluation of environmental interventions, have come under fire.⁴⁹ Problems with the inequitable *distribution* of environmental harm—and not only with the *production* of aggregated environmental ills—have played an increasingly important role in deliberations about global environmental governance. That is, global environmental governance is preoccupied not only with scarcity, but also with the distribution of the downsides of our choices about how to respond to scarcity. These ascendant concerns for environmental justice—and not only either aggregate environmental quality or sustainability—have tested the limits of an economic paradigm inherently unable to differentiate between luxury and livelihood, opening the door to challengers from the field of ecological democracy, among others.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For an interesting challenge to cost-benefit analysis, see Martha Nussbaum, "The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis," *The Journal of Legal Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2000), 1005-1036. See also Guido Calabresi and Philip Bobbitt, *Tragic Choices* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978); and Stephen A. Marglin, *The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Andrew Dobson, *Citizenship and the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Doreen Massey, *World City* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), for an extension of this logic of responsibility to the world-shaping power of global cities.

Along with such largely secular social imaginaries, global environmental governance has for many reasons also witnessed the ascendance of religious reason. Diverse religious imaginaries supply hypergoods necessary for confronting moral dilemmas, as well as cosmic moral visions necessary for discovering and exercising responsibility on the global stage. In his book, *The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror*, Manfred Steger argues convincingly that globalism has opened the door to the resurgence of religious discourse in the formation of social imaginaries.⁵¹ He emphasizes the religious dimensions of “global jihadism” while taking care not to imply any necessary link between Islam and terror; he argues that “global imperialism,” his shorthand for the global ambition of neoliberal political economy, incorporates “religious and moralistic features that mirror jihadism” in some respects; and he notes—perhaps with undue incredulity—that the “global justice movement” has “absorbed heavy doses of spiritual and religious thought.”⁵²

According to Steger’s logic, nationally scaled concerns had the potential to suppress religious reason by drawing boundaries that did not correspond to the cosmically scaled visions of many religions—that is, religious visions of the good world extended to the cosmic level, far surpassing the scale of national concerns. Globalization of our social world and systems, on the other hand, opens wider the door to religious reason by bounding the community in a way that does correspond to cosmic visions of the good and the right. Newfound geographic coincidence between the symbolic globalization of “sacred cosmic orders,”⁵³ cosmopolitan globalisms, and globalization in practice means that religious reason is more firmly established as grounds for public discourse on the global stage. In this way, Steger undermines the notion that the social

⁵¹ Manfred Steger, *The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Esposito, Fasching and Lewis, *Religion and Globalization: World Religions in Historical Perspective*, 4.

imaginaries most relevant to contemporary globalism are secular ideational alternatives to religious belief systems and reveals the global underpinnings of a resurgence of religion in the global public square at the beginning of what some have called “God’s century.”⁵⁴

This trend is evident in, but not limited to, global environmental governance.⁵⁵ Religious organizations are among those represented at conferences and meetings designed to determine the shape of international cooperation and to promote sustainability and justice. Their narratives are shaped by increasing connection to co-religionists across the world through the same global dynamics that generate exceptional wealth and exceptional risk. For example, evangelical Christians from the United States are in contact with Pentecostals from Peru and Honduras, who tell tales of the changing landscape of the Andes and La Ceiba due to the earliest consequences of climate change.⁵⁶ Globalization has increased the scale and frequency of such intra-traditional, ecumenical, and inter-faith dialogues about environmental challenges, strengthening the religious voice in this domain of global governance.

This rise of religious imaginaries in global environmental governance may prove to be a source of conflict and a barrier to sustainability and justice; the geographic coincidence of various religious imaginaries with the scales on which we can actually exercise power may prove to be the source of global disorder. Indeed, in a world of global dynamics, some fear increasing

⁵⁴ Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); Patrick James, ed., *Religion, Identity, and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence, and Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

⁵⁵ Noah J. Toly, "Changing the Climate of Religious Internationalism: Evangelical Responses to Climate Change and Human Suffering," in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (New York: Routledge, 2010), 403-418.

⁵⁶ For an account of Evangelical involvement in public debate about climate change, see Katharine Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

radicalization, the emergence of new religious fundamentalisms, and attendant conflict.⁵⁷

Especially given already predicted conflicts over resources, such as water, and environmental change, such as climate change, there may be reason to believe that such conflicts could be exacerbated by religious influence in global environmental governance. At best this would stifle innovation and suppress effective governance; at worst it would make efforts at environmental governance the cause of substantial conflict that could actually deepen environmental crises.

Alternatively, religious imaginaries may prove a powerful force for a flourishing future, not only sustaining the spiritual vitality of communities of faith, but also contributing to the common good even as they are themselves shaped by global dynamics.⁵⁸ In his treatment of globalization and theological ethics, William Schweiker refers to the emergence of various cosmic visions on the global stage, describing their coincidence as the “time of many worlds:”

I write about the present age as “the time of many worlds.” The idea of a “world” signals the fact that human beings always inhabit some space of meaning and value structured by cultural and social dynamics. Currently, diverse peoples and cultures, diverse “worlds,” are merging into an interdependent global reality. As one scholar has noted, the era “is creating a stronger sense of shared destiny among diverse peoples of the world, even while it is generating a more stressful sense of ethnic, religious, and cultural difference.” The stress of “worlds” colliding can take horrific expression in war and in terrorist attacks like the one on the World Trade Center in New York City in 2001 that killed thousands of innocent people from many cultures and religions. The stress of shared destiny can also take positive form, say in the human rights movement and growing ecological awareness around the planet. Interactions among peoples are forging, for good or for ill, the future of planetary life... How people meet this situation will shape forever life on this planet.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ William McNeill, “Cities and their Consequences,” *The American Interest: Policy, Politics, and Culture* 2, no. 4 (March/April 2007, 2007), 5-12.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ should serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011).

⁵⁹ William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In the Time of Many Worlds* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), xi, citing Richard A. Falk, *Human Rights Horizon: The Pursuit of Justice in a Globalizing World* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

This “time of many worlds” is one of peril and promise, potentiating on one hand radicalization and conflict, and, on the other hand, special opportunities to advance a flourishing life on earth. The erosion of a widespread sense of shared legitimacy belonging to hitherto predominant ways of thinking about environmental challenges, the increasing concern not only for sustainability but also for environmental justice, and the ascendance of religious reason in a global public square make imperative the clear articulation of the key problems in modern environmental thought and global environmental governance and demand theological and ethical reflection upon the Macondoization of the world. Moreover, such reflection must take stock of its context in a world of many religions. Nourishing the community of faith and contributing to the common good in our global “risk society” demands a constructive approach to the difficult choices that mark global environmental governance. We must understand the origins and implications of our risk society, and attempt to construe a responsible course of action. Nothing less than the future of the planet may depend upon it.

Tragedy, Responsibility, and the Cruciform Imaginary

It is important to begin to understand from theological and ethical points of view—as well as from political, social, and economic points of view—the Macondoization of the world. What should be made of the difficult choices—choices that in fact sometimes seem impossible and paralyzing for lack of a self-justifying option—when a sense of progress is accompanied by social and environmental challenges? What should be made of giant and sometimes grotesque techniques, “*both miraculous and destructive*,” hitherto “reserved for Divine Providence,” when they promise both life and death, when they give and they take away? How should we characterize the Macondoization of the world? And how should we respond to it?

Some have suggested that these questions are questions of how we should be like God. Indeed, our world-shaping power is in many ways God-like. We live now not only in a “risk society,” but also in “the Anthropocene,” an era in which human activity is the most significant force shaping the face of the earth.⁶⁰ Technologies previously reserved for Divine Providence, coupled with global dynamics, make us like God, giving us unprecedented world-shaping power in the face of difficult choices. A recent movement in environmental politics, post-environmentalism, has asserted that this power must be embraced and that difficult choices can be overcome. Post-environmentalists insist that the environmental movement has too long eschewed world-changing power, and that environmentalists have too long traded in “inconvenience,” austerity, and realism, and treated with contempt the power that they believe to be at fault for ecological crises. Instead post-environmentalists say we should welcome such power. According to Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, two of the most vocal post-environmentalists, the problem isn’t our use of power; rather, “the problem is... that [people] do not allow themselves to dream.” Here I quote Nordhaus and Shellenberger at length:

The logic of the dream is expansive, ecological, and emotional. There’s no distinguishing the interpretation of our dream from the dream, itself. The beings in our dreams are manifestations of our feelings, selves, and ideas. Some say we are all parts of the dream; others say we are whatever we say we are. In our dreams, we aren’t bound by the laws of nature—not even by gravity. Good becomes evil and evil good in the blink of an eye. We fall and then we fly. We transmogrify. In a single dream, you might begin as your mother, become yourself, and end as your son.

The crises we face demand not that we *wake up to reality* but rather that we *dream differently*. There is a very special kind of dreaming, where one is both dreaming and reasoning at the same time. It is called a lucid dream. The lucid dreamer is in control—at least partly. This awareness gives him the power to do

⁶⁰ P. J. Crutzen and E. F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000), 17–18. See also Andrew Light, “Beyond Durban: A New Agenda for Climate Ethics,” paper delivered at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, Charlottesville, Virginia, June 2012.

whatever he imagines. He can fly to the sun without fear of falling and confront the shadow chasing him.

For much of human history, we have told ourselves stories aimed at constraining our potential out of fear of offending higher political authorities. But today, there is no political authority higher than humankind itself. Whether we like it or not, humans have become the meaning of the earth.

We should see in hubris not only what is negative and destructive, but also what is positive and creative: The aspiration to imagine new realities, create new values, and reach new heights of human possibility.⁶¹

Here Shellenberger and Nordhaus echo Stewart Brand, regarded by some as the first post-environmentalist, who wrote in the introduction to the famed *Whole Earth Catalog*, “*We are as gods and might as well get good at it.*”⁶² As Shellenberger and Nordhaus write, “[*W*]e have given birth to a new world. It is a world at once beautiful and terrible. And this world, too, *we shall overcome.*”⁶³ Post-environmentalism represents a sort of magical realism—“we transmogrify,” or transform in a surprising and magical manner—emphasizing the potential transcendence of tradeoffs and tensions through God-like power, through the intervention of “things too strange to believe.” Indeed, it has no role for tensions and tradeoffs as necessary or enduring characteristics of the human condition.

But we must reckon with the fact that our Macondo is a world of *tragic* realism. Things “too strange to believe”—technical advances in machinery, biological engineering, social systems, and other fields—highlight the ways in which we respond to tensions, tradeoffs, and instabilities between and among goods that are part of the finite created order and must be part of any realistic account of our world. In *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition*, Edward

⁶¹ Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, *BreakThrough: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

⁶² Stewart Brand, *The Whole Earth Catalog* (Menlo Park, CA: Whole Earth Access Catalog, 1968-1972). Emphasis added. Notably, Brand was also instrumental in pressuring the release of the first NASA photo of Earth from space.

⁶³ Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Breakthrough*, 273.

Farley describes these tensions, tradeoffs, and instabilities as the tragic dimension of the human condition.⁶⁴ By identifying the challenge of tragedy as a perduring feature of the human condition, Farley locates the question of dealing with tradeoffs, tensions, and instabilities not as one of how to be like God, but one of what it means to be human.

Farley organizes human existence into three spheres—the interhuman, the personal, and the social—each of which is tragically structured, marked by vulnerability, incompatibility, and limitation. Social systems respond to the tragic either through the dynamics of subjugation or the dynamics of liberation. In the former case, those who seek to transcend vulnerability, incompatibility, and limitation displace the costs of this transcendence onto others. According to Farley’s schema, the Macondoization of the world involves our increasingly powerful, and yet self-centered, responses to tragic structures of the human condition and the finite world. Social systems meant to integrate, concentrate, and accumulate goods for particular populations have displaced the costs and burdens of this integration, concentration, and accumulation onto others, including the poor, far-off populations, far-off generations, and non-human creatures, destabilizing the conditions for human life. On the other hand, Farley argues that the social sphere has embedded not only possibilities for subjugation, but also possibilities for liberation, which requires both “radical criticism” and “theonomous sociality.” The former will be considered in the last section of this paper; theonomous sociality “has to do with how a society manages and transcends its tragic conflicts and natural centrisms.”⁶⁵ Theonomous sociality is possible when the institutions that constitute the fabric of social systems transcend their own particularity not by repudiating “location, territory, or specific cultural content,” but by “taking

⁶⁴ Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

⁶⁵ Farley, *Good and Evil*, 13652.

up (*Aufheben*) the aims and goods of particularity into agendas oriented to the well-being of broader environments.”⁶⁶

We might describe the social imaginary of such a community as a “cruciform imaginary,” one that authorizes discourses, institutions, and practices that transcend self-centeredness in favor of agendas oriented toward the well-being of broader environments. The cruciform imaginary involves discourses, institutions, and practices of responsible action, which is aptly captured by Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s notion of *Stellvertretung*, or vicarious representative action. Bonhoeffer describes the context for responsible action as precisely one structured by tragedy: “Responsible action must not simply decide between right and wrong, good and evil, but between right and right, wrong and wrong. ‘Right collides with right,’ as Aeschylus stated.”^{67, 68}

Stellvertretung is a core concept of responsible action as it is worked out across Bonhoeffer’s

⁶⁶ Ibid., 13675.

⁶⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 284. A more thorough exploration of the implications of Bonhoeffer’s engagement with Aeschylus will be presented below, in the concluding section of the paper. According to Larry Rasmussen, *Ethics* begins Bonhoeffer’s critical work on “responsibility,” “responsible action,” “responsibility toward history,” and “responsible people,” as the “locus for thinking beyond present failures.”⁶⁷ Larry Rasmussen, “The Ethics of Responsible Action,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 207.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 284. In the case of the citation from *The Libation Bearers*, Bonhoeffer and contemporary English translators use the word “right” to translate the Greek word, *dike*. Notably, Thomas Rosenmeyer argues that “Aeschylus’ *Dike*... designates the state of normalcy, and the spirit or the institutions required to maintain or restore that normalcy. *Dike* is a social metaphor for the whole, and for the health of that whole.” Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 293. Rosenmeyer also argues that the verb, *sumballo*, one with a semantic range similar to the English word, “encounter,” should be understood in a cooperative way—“right comes together to cooperate with right” or “right joins with right”—rather than a hostile way—“right clashes with right” or “right collides with right.” Robert Fagles, however, chooses to translate *sumballo* as “clash.” See Aeschylus, *The Oresteia: Agamemnon; The Libation Bearers; The Eumenides* (New York: Penguin, 1979). This is consistent with the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon translation, which refers to Aeschylus’ use when noting the meaning, “come to blows,” under a heading of hostile encounters. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=cumbalei%3D&la=greek&prior=%29/arei&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0007:card=461&i=1#lexicon>. A lengthy excursus on these lines in *The Libation Bearers* can be found in Robert Fagles and W. B. Stanford’s “A Reading of the Oresteia,” which serves as an introduction to Aeschylus, *The Oresteia: Agamemnon*. Understanding Bonhoeffer’s citation of Aeschylus illuminates other aspects of Bonhoeffer’s argument and, in this case, aids in understanding concepts of justification and responsible action, while suggesting an approach to witness or testimony (this will be explored at length in the conclusion). In this way, Bonhoeffer’s citation of Aeschylus proves to be what H. Richard Niebuhr describes as a “luminous sentence,” a sentence that, once understood, allows the reader better to grasp the whole of a complex argument. Niebuhr drafts the idea of a luminous sentence as a metaphor for revelation, but it proves to be an apt description of other tasks of reading, as well. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

corpus. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. writes that *Stellvertretung* is “the heart of the structure of responsible life” in Bonhoeffer.⁶⁹ Clifford Green indicates that *Stellvertretung* means “responsible action on behalf of others, particularly action which takes responsibility for the communities to which we belong.”⁷⁰ As Green writes, “At the deepest theological level, the paradigm of [our] vicarious responsible action for others is the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Christ, in whom God acts in freedom and love for the sake of all humanity.”⁷¹ Through the cruciform imaginary, the reality of Jesus Christ comes into transformative contact with the Macondoization of the world, with the realities of scarcity, tragedy, and risk:

Western thought, especially since the Renaissance, is so decisively shaped by this deepest insight of antiquity that only very rarely has it been noticed that *the Christian message has actually overcome this insight*. In its claim to depict ultimate realities, there is certainly no doubt that Protestant ethics is still firmly under the spell of antiquity without being aware of that fact. It is not Luther but Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides who have given human life this tragic aspect. Luther’s seriousness is completely different from the seriousness of those classical tragedians. What must ultimately be taken seriously in the view of the Bible and in Luther’s view is not the conflict between the Gods as expressed in their laws, but the unity of God and the reconciliation of the world with God in Jesus Christ... not fate, but the *ultimate* reality of life.⁷²

With this qualification, Bonhoeffer does not diminish the force of tragedy as a means of understanding the structures of lived reality. Rather, he establishes the “ultimate reality” of Jesus Christ as the ground of responsible action, the paradigmatic liberating alternative to the practices of subjugation.

Here the work of David E. Klemm and William Schweiker is helpful in giving further shape to responsibility. They argue that the principle of responsibility is “to respect and enhance

⁶⁹ Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., “Bonhoeffer’s Literary Legacy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.

⁷⁰ Clifford Green, “Human Sociality and Christian Community,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.

⁷¹ Green, “Human Sociality and Christian Community.”

⁷² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 264-265. Emphasis added.

the integrity of life before God,” by integrating basic, natural, social, reflective, and spiritual goods.⁷³ Klemm and Schweiker argue that respect entails acknowledging the worth and dignity of others, rooted in an appreciation of God’s good creation and the love-command of Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Respecting and enhancing the *integrity* of life means promoting the coherence and wholeness of these goods—seeking to *integrate* them with and for others—in the face of intractable incoherence and fragmentation. Faced with the types of choices that characterize global environmental governance—tragic choices built upon tragic structures of the human condition—the cruciform imaginary promotes the respect and enhancement of the integrity of life with and for others. So environmental governance that reflects these principles is marked by the integration of goods for other human beings, for the non-human creation, and before God. While this essay does not provide sufficient space to work out the many practical implications of such a position, it is clear that the discourses, institutions, and practices of global environmental governance would need to produce and respond to knowledge about the consequences of our actions. It is likewise clear that efficiency is an important principle of environmental governance—the more efficient we are, the more goods we preserve and the fewer tragic choices we must make. Nevertheless, economic logics should not be the primary ways in which we govern environmental conditions because in their aggregating tendencies they mute the voices of those who absorb the costs of our responses to the tragic structures of life. We must be able to ask, “efficiency for whom?”

⁷³ David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 82. See also William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); idem., *Dust that Breathes: Christian Faith and the New Humanisms* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); and idem., *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics*.

⁷⁴ Klemm and Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future*, 82-83.

The Libation Bearers: Pluralism and Responsibility

Contemporary environmental governance faces not only the challenge of tragedy, but also the challenge of pluralism. Any practically relevant posture toward global environmental governance must reckon with this challenge. The first step is to note that pluralism is a corollary of tragedy. If the frictions and incompatibilities of the human condition mean that some goods must be given up, then there will be a plurality of potentially legitimate, even if not self-justifying, approaches to a given situation. This does not mean that there are no wrong approaches—approaches marked by subjugation, for instance—but it *does* mean that pluralism should be recognized as itself a perduring feature of the human condition *and* a potential source of creativity in our approach to the tragic structures of life. Governance mechanisms should be developed in such a way as would respect and increase the visibility of the plurality of social imaginaries that reckon with the tragic structures of the human condition. Market mechanisms may elegantly translate individual preferences into an outcome, but in the process they obscure plurality, and by handling distribution better than allocation, they efface discussion of the ends to which the discourses, institutions, and practices of environmental governance should be directed. Governance processes that underscore and value, rather than efface, pluralism are essential, especially in our “time of many worlds.”

Recognizing pluralism itself as a perduring feature of the human condition and a corollary of tragedy means that there is a sort of radical ambiguity even to potentially legitimate social systems, an ambiguity that forbids the sacralization of any one system. Here again the articulation of responsibility by Klemm and Schweiker is helpful; to respect and enhance the integrity of life *before God* is to acknowledge that God is “supremely important and real.” If it is God, and not any one social system, that is supremely important and real, this empowers what

Farley describes as radical criticism, a “comprehensive term for all attempts to identify and discredit the subjugations of a social system.”⁷⁵ Radical criticism would seek to prevent the confusion of any one social system with what Farley describes as “transhistorical redemption” and to forbid the identification of any social system with something like the kingdom of God. Social systems, practices, and techniques that obscure the persistent reality of tragedy or suggest its transcendence create soteriological myths and pretend to a sort of deliverance that risks absolutism. Practically speaking, governance processes should provide mechanisms for feedback that take seriously the possibility that an admittedly ambiguous social system may perpetuate not only certain “benign alienations,” but also subjugations.

Finally, the recognition of a plurality of potentially legitimate, even if not self-justifying, options for responding to the tragic structure of the human condition only reinforces Farley’s judgment that the tragic is a *perduring* feature—that tragic choices cannot be eliminated from human experience. This means that we must urge action in the face of the sometime impossibility of self-justification. It also means urging action in which agents take on themselves the burdens and costs of integrating goods for others, rather than displacing those costs onto others. In these moments, our voice should be like the voice of the chorus in *The Libation Bearers*, the second book of Aeschylus’ trilogy, *The Oresteia*, cited by Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics*. The trilogy tells the story of Orestes, son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, King of Argos.⁷⁶ In *Agamemnon*, the first book of the trilogy, Clytemnestra awaits the return of her victorious, pedicidal, and adulterous husband, plotting his murder in order to avenge his human sacrifice of their daughter and to pursue unhindered her adulterous relationship with Agamemnon’s cousin.

⁷⁵ Farley, *Good and Evil*, 13709.

⁷⁶ Aeschylus, *The Oresteia: Agamemnon; The Libation Bearers; The Eumenides*.

Upon Agamemnon's return, Clytemnestra kills him. The second book, *The Libation Bearers*, recounts Orestes' struggle to do right by both his mother and his father. Orestes finds himself equally unable to justify either killing his mother or leaving his father's murder unpunished. Under threat of retribution by Zeus if he does not avenge his father and under threat by his mother's Erinyes⁷⁷—supernatural personifications of the anger of the dead—if he does, Orestes faces the burden of both discernment and action in a context in which right collides with right. As Robert Fagles and W. B. Stanford note,

The gods and the furies clash ..., surrounding Orestes with excruciating pressure ... Justice is matricide ... The peak of personal commitment is the peak of guilt, as well. ... [Orestes] is both the avenger and the son, justice and the curse. ... He is murderous and moral. ... [Orestes] must choose between doing something and doing nothing ... To avenge his father, he must kill his mother.⁷⁸

The chorus—consisting of elderly women taking libations to the grave of the deceased Agamemnon—appeals to the moirai, the goddesses of fate and daughters of Ananke, goddess of necessity, who ensure the relationship between cause and effect, debt and repayment, guilt and atonement, to press Orestes into vengeful matricide. Understanding that Orestes has passed the limits of self-justification, the chorus suggests that only a god may intervene in order to work the tension between right and right into a “song of joy.” Pressed to action by the chorus and braced by its arguments, Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother and her lover, but without a sense of self-justification. The third book, *The Eumenides*, tells the story of Orestes' flight to Athens, submission to a tribunal led by Athena, and acquittal. Having avenged his father's murder, Orestes is pursued to Athens by the Erinyes, who, according to Walter Burkert, embody “the act of self-cursing.”⁷⁹ Despite executing right by his father and Zeus, Orestes incurred a

⁷⁷ In Roman literature, the Erinyes are called “Furies” or “Dirae.”

⁷⁸ Robert Fagles and W. B. Stanford, “A Reading of the Oresteia.”

⁷⁹ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1977), 198.

curse and its consequences for the murder of his mother. Upon arriving in Athens and appealing to Athena, Orestes submits to a twelve-member tribunal—populated by the goddess and eleven Athenians—which splits its vote evenly in judging his case, thus acquitting him without a declaration of innocence. In a twist, it is not Orestes that is declared good, but the Erinyes, themselves, who agree to desist in their pursuit of Orestes, whose names are changed to the Eumenides—the gracious ones or well-doing ones—and to whom the Athenians agree to give praise.

In Aeschylus' play, the libation bearers that form the chorus both urge responsible action *and* witness to the fact that Orestes will find no opportunity for self-justification, but that only a god can justify. This is the role that we are called to play. While our imitation of Christ consists of responsible action in a tragic world, our faith in Christ consists in complete dependence upon *his* responsible action and the news of what God has done, is doing, and will do through that work. God has reestablished the center in Christ. Because he has, we can hope for a time when right does not collide with right and good with good. In the face of scarcity, tragedy, and risk, when we are reminded of Orestes' cry, "Now force clash with force—right with right!" we can serve as the chorus, urging the world to "respect and enhance the integrity of life before God," despite life's seemingly intractable disintegration, and reminding all that "still some god, if he desires, may work our strains into a song of joy."