

THE ENVIRONMENT, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: AN
ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

By

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ABSTRACT

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Christianity emerged from the desert periphery of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire's growth necessitated centuries of imperial conquests, stratification, and extensive resource extraction. The result was widespread state oppression, social injustice, and environmental instability. Christianity responded to the Roman Empire's oppression and domination through political mobilization, social transformation, and ecological restoration. A knowledge that taught ecocentrism, communalism, and material simplicity is revealed in the oral and written tradition of first-century Christianity. To practice Christianity in accordance with the teaching of Jesus was to be inherently opposed to conquest and expansion. In resistance to the anthropocentric and consumerist lifestyle of the Roman Empire, the early Christian community sought to integrate balance into the interaction between the human and the other non-human forms of life

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INTRODUCTION

The current Western worldview promotes misuse of human and non-human beings (Devall and Sessions 1985; Drengson 2006). A worldview, or a social paradigm, is “the collection of values, beliefs, habits, and norms which forms the frame of reference for a collectivity of people,” (Devall and Sessions 1985, 42). Attitudes toward and perceptions of the relationship between the human and the earth are generated from the basic assumptions of a worldview.

Sociologists William Catton, Jr. and Riley Dunlap summarize the four primary assumptions of the Western worldview (Catton and Dunlap 1980). This Western worldview understands that first, human beings are fundamentally different from all non-human beings. Second, human beings can access free will and activate agency. Third, the world provides unlimited opportunities for human growth. Fourth, the course of human history is progress, so progress must never cease (paraphrased from Devall and Sessions 1985, 43). From these basic assumptions, attitudes of anthropocentrism, individualism, consumerism, and industrialism can arise.

Both human and natural habitats have suffered under the Western world-view (Devall and Sessions 1985; Naess 1989). To establish the infrastructure capable of perpetuating the material conditions that allow the attitudes of anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism to prosper, the West has imposed “a uniform technology and economic system on every place in the world,” (Drengson 2006, 2). Although “the planet Earth is blessed by tremendous linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity,” the

Western employment of technology has been systematically infiltrated into the human habitat to such an extent that both the human and the natural landscape are relatively homogenous (Drengson 2006, 2). The way of the West has been and continues to become the only rational social-evolutionary trajectory.

The Western worldview also generates ecological imbalance (Devall and Sessions 1985; Drengson 1995). Although military or hegemonic conquest has allowed access to land within which raw materials may dwell, history reveals that the over-extractive Western civilization has in the past contracted into decline due to its generally irreproducible system of organization that places great stress on the natural environment (Chew 2001). Since expansion and economic progress perpetuate the attitudes of anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism, “the Earth is seen primarily, if not exclusively, as a collection of natural resources,” (Devall and Sessions 1985, 43).¹ Refusing to practice an ecocentric, communal, and materially simplistic worldview will again destabilize the fragile ecological balance between extraction and consumption (Sale 1980; Naess 1989; McGinnis 1999). This environmental upset could force a spontaneous reorganization of social interaction (Chew 2007).

In practicing attitudes of anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism, the self is center of cultural priority (Drengson 2005). Although the nature of the self may be clearly defined among practitioners of this worldview, “the ego pursuits and shallow glitz and thrills of consumer society do not bring deep and lasting satisfaction. They are

¹ William Catton Jr. and Riley Dunlap, “New Ecological Paradigm for Post-Exuberant Sociology,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 24 (September 1980), pp.15-48.

substitutes for the deep love that connects us with other persons, other beings and the Earth,” (Drengson 2006, 5). In some circles, the disconnect has infiltrated even the religion. Contemporary Christian theologian, Harvey Cox, spoke for the vision of a technological society when he looked with approval on the dominance of the city in the future. Ideal was 'the most distinct expression of man's separation from nature' in which 'nature in any untrammelled form will exist in sparse lots and only because man allows it.’”² It is apparent that many questions regarding the relationship of the Christian within the ecosystem remain unanswered, but clearly Christianity is not innocent from alienation.

Much blame for this fragmenting world-view has been scattered throughout various points of history. Some point fingers at the Judeo-Christian story of Adam and his apparent dominion over the earth.³ Medieval historian Lynn White Jr. offers the most recognized argument for this position in his 1967 paper, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis.” He writes that, “more science and more technology are not going to get us out of our present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one... We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the

² Harvey Cox, *The Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1966); originally quoted from Frederick Elder, *Crisis in Eden: A Religious Study of Man and the Environment* (Boston: Abingdon Press, 1970).

³ Others condemn the Enlightenment for initiating a mechanistic worldview to fragment the scientific paradigm. Philosopher Alan Drengson states in his paper, “Shifting Paradigms: From Technocrat to Planetary Person,” that “certain paradigms of the physical sciences have come to be widely applied, not only to all natural sciences, but also to the social sciences, and in limited ways, to the humanities. In these fields too we find attempts at precision and objectivity, experimental methods, quantification and analysis, methods modeled after the paradigms of the physical sciences, especially as these came to be defined by mechanistic conceptions of the world,” (Drengson 1995). As the intellect has been divided into fragmentary parts, the corresponding worldview has also disengaged from a holistic perspective. Practicers of this worldview are alienated and no longer in a position to identify the scope or range of the consequences of their actions.

Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man... Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our destiny” (quoted in Devall and Session 1985). White condemns the rampant practice of the attitude of anthropocentrism among the Christians, and challenges them to redefine the relationship between their religion and their Earth.

Quite clearly, the general principles of Christianity do not support such attitudes as those encouraged through the Western worldview. Reportedly, the two greatest commandments within the Christian tradition are to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Realized together, they illustrate a chain of command where the self is in the realm of servitude to God and to others. As discussed earlier, however, the Western worldview promotes attitudes that exalt the self and degenerate the other beings, both human and non-human. There remains a disconnect between the existing structure of Christian belief, and a deeper understanding of interconnectivity.

The Christian worldview should complement and assist ecological balance, but a wide disconnect has alienated the intention of the practice from its completion. Drengson compares the assumptions of the Traditional Christian approach with the Modern approach and the Ecological approach. In this, he identifies that the Traditional Christian will accept that reality is dependent upon individual perception, that the physical properties of existence extend beyond our individual perception, that the quality of life is defined through brother and sister hood and fellowship, that the intention of life is to discover salvation, and that salvation is discoverable through the teachings of the Church

(Drengson 2006, 13). It is the final assumption that is questionable. If the intention of the Church was to regenerate its own power structure, why is it safe to assume that its doctrine will without a doubt fulfill every promise? The Church has eliminated fundamental processes in its agenda to maintain central power.

Mysticism was a central feature of Christian organization until about one century prior to the gathering of the Council of Nicaea (Timothy 1972). There were as many truths as community members. The lack of official canon allowed the network of communities known as the Church to function as an egalitarian democracy (Perkins 1980). Although the oral tradition faded sometime during the second century, the Christian communities and churches still referenced a fairly extensive collection of literatures in their search for knowledge. As the works of the heresiologists and the subsequent secondary interpretations illustrate, the divisions within the Church over claims to absolute truth were widespread, and so reorganization was necessary to generate a consolidated ideological power (Perkins 1980; Harris 1994; Pagels 2003).

For the Church to function as a ruling power, it required loyal subjects, but in the early third century, the range of belief within the Christian organization became apparent. For instance, Irenaeus, an orthodox leader, “was convinced that the presence of the Valentian Christians was dangerously divisive- that it undermined the preaching of the gospel and the authority of its leaders. He wanted them either to abandon their ‘heresy’ or be cut off from the churches,” (Pagels 2003, 138). For the next century and a half, violent dispute and intolerance censored individual experience during worship in favor of homogenous consensus.

Finally, this torrid unfolding of an institutional religion catalyzed in the fourth century. At that time, “persecution suddenly gave way to official toleration of Christians under Constantine, and then to the construction of a Christian Empire, [and] a coalition of bishops would [then] take up Irenaeus’s agenda and attempt to realize his vision of a catholic- that is, universal- orthodox church,” (Pagels 2003, 158). The members of the Christian community had to recognize a common authority under the Church; the fear of the threat of heretical thought granted the Church that authority (Nigg 1962; Vallee 1981). Knowledge was no longer accessible through the human alone; he or she now required the assistance from the Church to understand his or her position upon the Earth; The spirit of opposition to oppression that characterized the Christian for so many centuries became secondary to the fear of sin and judgment.

It is essential that the Christian community realign itself with attitudes of opposition to anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism. The current worldview destroys the humans and the Earth. Through the current worldview, “nature comes to be treated only as a resource,” and people as well “are evaluated on the basis of their functions, rather than in terms of their intrinsic worth. Production of things becomes more important than persons and communities,” (Drengson 1995; 84). The self is valued higher than another human, a non-human who relies on a thriving ecosystem, or the Earth as a whole collective.

When an entire culture of selves all understand their interaction with the external physical reality in this way, the result is “exponential material expansion,” (Naess 1989, 25). The goods must be produced, because they will be consumed. They will be

consumed because the humans practice attitudes that exalt the self such that damage is unrecognizable without objective, ecological knowledge. Due to “an exponentially increasing, and partially or totally irreversible environmental deterioration or devastation perpetuated through firmly established ways of production and consumption,” the human and the Earth are suffering pending crisis (Naess 1989, 23). Reorganization must occur within the human community, to respond appropriately to the needs of the Earth so that our own species will continue to thrive alongside other species as well. However, without a fundamental shift in world-view and subsequent attitude away from anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism, and toward ecocentrism, communalism, and simplicity, reorganization will result only in the same patterns demonstrated throughout the history of the West. The Christian movement, which could easily identify with the values of communalism and material simplicity and which could understand the concept of ecocentrism, must respond to the suffering of the Earth brought about through the dominant worldview.

Research Problem

That the structure of the Church is fragmented should be no surprise. The Church has been divided amongst itself since the first century AD (Nigg 1962; Harris 1994). This turbulent past is reflected in the lack of clear understanding among the members of the current Christian community regarding its responsibilities toward the Earth (Naess 1989). Whenever the Bible is studied “from an ecological viewpoint” it presents multiple and clearly conflicting conclusions. It can support either an ecocentric interpretation, or

an anthropocentric interpretation. These “radically different attitudes ... must be expected when the history of the origin of the Bible is taken into consideration,” (Naess 1989, 183).

The Bible was not compiled until the fourth century (Pagels 2003). Prior to that time, the Christian communities shared in oral tradition and storytelling to regenerate their knowledge and understanding (Nickle 1980). This became problematic when the structure began to institutionalize. The Church patriarchs “thought that they could not live with multiple interpretations of the teachings of Jesus, for then there would be many churches, each unique, celebrating the divine as manifest in their own people and places. There should be only one 'true' Church for the Roman founders,” (Drengson 2006, 16). To control the flow of knowledge, the founders instituted a centralized and authoritative canon. This slowed the exchange of oral tradition and increased the power of the institutional Church (Nigg 1962; Perkins 1980).

The Church was unchallengeable, since it “claimed unique, universal authority for its rule. This included rule over the civil and spiritual life. The early Church created a male dominated, hierarchical, power-over control system. This authoritarian system was intolerant of any other approaches to values and it opposed deep questioning into ultimate meaning and purpose. Other spiritual approaches were seen as a threat to imposed central control,” (Drengson 2006, 3). The intention of the Bible was to compile a tool of ideological power. Pagels describes the scene in Rome in 325AD best:

To strengthen his own alliance with church leaders and to unify fractious Christian groups into one harmonious structure, Constantine charged bishops from churches throughout the empire to meet at his expense at Nicaea, an inland

city, near a large lake, to work out a standard formulation of Christian faith. From that meeting and its aftermath, during the tumultuous decades that followed, emerged the Nicene Creed that would effectively clarify and elaborate the ‘canon of truth,’ along with what we call the canon- the list of twenty-seven writings which would become the New Testament. Together these would help establish what Irenaeus had envisioned- a worldwide communion of ‘orthodox’ Christians joined into one ‘catholic and apostolic’ church (Pagels 2003, 170).

Some may ponder as to why this matters today, nearly 1700 years after the fact.

Without a doubt, the Western worldview is related “to our religious history as a civilization. It is partly because we in the West have suffered from spiritual repression, as a result of centralized control of religious life and institutions which only begin to disintegrate in the modern period with the Protestant reformation,” (Drengson 2006, 1). Because the primary source of spiritual activity in the West, from the Council in the fourth century until the Reformation in the sixteenth century, had been enacted through the authoritarian structure of the Church, free expression was censured and the knowledge became limited and fragmented. The current worldview arose from these conditions (Drengson 2006; Pagels 1979). How then does the Christian West return to free spiritual movement to understand ecological knowledge?

With the historical context of the Bible and its relevancy now clarified, it is important to question whether or not it in and of itself can act as a full and complete tool to guide a human above the circumstances of his or her worldview. For this reason, when seeking to reveal the ecological foundations within the Christian tradition, the scope of study must extend to the textual references beyond the Bible. For this reason, the analysis to follow will consist of both canonical and non-canonical text from the first and second century AD. Although the non-canonical texts have been in the past been

undermined, recent archaeological discoveries have led scholars to demur the previous assumptions of irrelevance (Cameron 1982). Historical and rapidly quantifiable evidence and subsequent “critical analysis” of this evidence “is providing the opportunity to examine more fully the history of the literature in which Jesus traditions were transmitted, since substantial non-canonical texts can now be used as primary sources to clarify the developments of gospel traditions,” (Cameron 1982, 15). Therefore, this analysis will study the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, as well as select documents of the Nag Hammadi codices.

These literatures will illuminate that the instruction of Jesus advances a trajectory of ecological community. Originating from within a political structure of intense social oppression and environmental exploitation, early Christianity organized from the instruction of Jesus was a response to the ongoing human and earth injustice of the Roman Empire. A visitation of the social context of the Roman Empire will illuminate why an intervention into the existing world structure was necessary, and an analysis of the philosophies in the early Christian literatures will reveal the projection toward restorative balance between the human and the Earth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Textual interpretation forms the basis for the methodology utilized. My sources consist of both primary documents, and secondary literature. The thesis connects the systemic activity of the Roman Empire with the rise of first century Christian practice to provide the necessary political, social and ecological context for a meaningful philosophical discussion.

First, I illustrated Rome's tendencies toward social and ecological instability. I examined the political, economic, and cultural structure of Rome as dependent upon the consolidation of wealth, warfare, and consumption, respectively. I interpreted primary historical text, secondary historical interpretation, social history, excerpts from letters, and social-historical data. Then, I reviewed the available secondary sociological literature identifying the instruction of Jesus as politically and socially revolutionary. This literature was interpreted for themes of autonomy, mobilization, community, and resource distribution. To follow, I identified primary Scriptural text to demonstrate evidence of ecological intention within the political and social instruction of Jesus.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Rome, as a Republic, celebrated centuries of success (Harris 1979). For four hundred years until c. AD 200, it prospered with positive economic growth. The subjects in the core of the Empire benefited from its accumulating wealth during this expansionary phase. However, the processes of expansion practiced through the centuries perpetuated a destabilizing cycle of exploitation on the human and on the Earth.

This chapter provides a broad structural analysis, examining the interplay of wealth and poverty upon an exploited earth; it illuminates the struggle among the rich to maintain a consolidation of power regardless of widespread social and environmental injustice. It illustrates the expansionary movement of the government as an entity that accelerates force to maintain its own existence, consuming the bodies of the humans and the non-humans alike, to perpetuate its structure of power and privilege. Rome and its government, like a primitive organism, became fat until there was nothing left upon which it could feed.

The Economic Structure

Initial expansion

During the trajectory of expansion, the value of land was determined by its use value for the Republic (Chew 2001; Duncan-Jones 1990). Warfare was part of the process of accumulation during this period of positive growth, and was understood as

vital for securing the materials for expansion⁴ (Harris 1979). The land and the labor acquired through wars provided the necessary resources for continued growth.⁵ The first of the expansion was within the geographic area of the Italian Peninsula; this conquest provided fertile agricultural land (Toynbee 1970). Rome itself was located on the River Tiber in the northwestern lowlands with the volcanic soil of the Ager Romanus nearby. Also in close proximity was the plow land in north western Etruria and the iron-ore in Populonia and on the island of Elba. By 226 B.C. the entire Italian Peninsula was Roman territory (Toynbee 1970).

The Roman army was able to accomplish its military objective with little resistance from the communities inhabiting the Highlands of the Peninsula (Toynbee 1970). The Highlanders were culturally backward with little or no history of military experience, and were often times proud to become Roman citizens following conquest. Of course, the “city-state way of life” was effectively marketed to them, so many passively and graciously enlarged the Roman body politic with no complaints about being conquered (Toynbee 1970). The Roman agenda was to obtain land for material power, and for its citizenry to exercise hegemonic privilege.

During the centuries of growth, Rome had to increase its agricultural productivity and its mineral extraction capabilities (Duncan-Jones 1990). The peripheral zones of

⁴ The Romans were unable to disassociate the economic gains of warfare from the expectation for victory; success during war was demonstrated as both military and material power (Harris 1979, 56).

⁵ “Besides territorial control, the Roman state also claimed for itself the natural resources, such as mineral resources and stone quarries, of the conquered provinces,” (Chew 2001, 74).

Africa, Sicily and Spain provided the Roman subjects with their basic living materials.

Peter Garnsey notes that,

“a city of one million people could only have grown so big and remained so big by drawing on the resources of the whole empire. It is customary, and accurate, to view the western provinces as the main suppliers of Rome: African and Sicilian grain, Gallic wine, African oil, Spanish wine, and more particularly, oil were in quantity in Rome,” (Garnsey 1987, 58).

Military strong-holds on these peripheral areas were essential, and numerous troops were required to secure the borders (Chew 2001).

The Roman economy relied upon expansion through warfare. The Roman villages of Cremona and Placentia sprung up on territory taken from Gaul, while records indicate an increase in the building of temples in Rome during this time (Harris 1979).

The slave supply, in fact, rose exponentially during the second century BC. Harris contends that, “an adequate supply of slaves at reasonable prices was not likely to be forthcoming in peaceful conditions,” (Harris 1979, 84). Slaves, then, were only widely available in times of war.

Warfare has also been closely linked to trade. Records indicate that Roman Senators favored the merchants through the power of state (Harris 1979). This assertion is apparent during the war against the Carthaginians. When Carthage imprisoned 500 merchants from Rome, the Roman army took advantage of the hostage situation, invaded Sardinia, and then turned its forces against Carthage. When the Carthaginians finally released the 500 merchants, the Romans freed 2,743 Carthaginian prisoners (Harris 1979). To the Senate, one Roman merchant was as politically important as nearly three Carthaginian prisoners, who would most likely become slaves if not returned to Carthage.

The heightened value of the merchant contrasted with the diminished value of free labor suggests that the Roman Senate was persistent to increase the extension of the marketplace. Rome, at this time, was in an expansionary trajectory.

Expansion beyond Italy continued during the years 264 through 219 BC. The territory in the West had productive lands and labor (Garnsey 1987; Harris 1979). After nearly a century of war, Rome finally conquered Britain, much of the Iberian Peninsula, Gaul, and Carthage. This covered a fair proportion of land mass in the West (Harris 1979; Toynbee 1970). By the first century BC, Rome was an economic core based on the accumulation of wealth and slavery. This accumulation generated destruction upon the natural landscape.

Roman silver

The process of silver extraction and trade highlights one of the imbalanced interactions between the Roman culture and the earth. Silver, an exchangeable commodity, was necessary for trade between Rome and the Far East. The Romans imported luxury consumer items from the east and exchanged silver extracted from the Spanish mines to pay their debt (Chew 2001). However, imperialism through a colonial relationship had increased demand for manufactured Roman products in the west so laborers in the mines extracted gold and silver to exchange for manufactured items from Rome (Chew 2001; Thorley 1971).⁶ Rome then exchanged these metals to the East to pay for luxury items. Consumption eventually increased so much that by the first and

⁶ Chew 2001; cross reference with Whittaker 1994 and Oldenstein 1985.

second century AD, Rome was experiencing a trade deficit with the Far East (Chew 2001). Rome responded to this deficit not with conscious reduction of consumptive habits, but by opening more mines in the West.⁷

As the process of accumulation continued unabated, the mining of silver was expanded to fuel the materialistic consumption. The increased consumption of the silver accelerated also the consumption of natural resources. Through the process of exchange and growth in the first century BC, Rome was consuming approximately 40 to 45 metric tons of silver each year (Chew 2001). Because the mines were as many as 250 meters underground, each ton of silver required removal of 1,000,000 tons of rock from the earth (Chew 2001). The rock was pounded by hand and then repeatedly smashed until most of the impurities were separated from the ore (White 1984). Further unwanted materials were then removed from the raw product through a process of washing. The laborers crushed the ore while submerging it in a sluice, and the lighter materials were then sieved out under water (White 1984; Healy 1979). This extraction process required approximately 22,500 labor-years for 45 metric tons of silver (Chew 2001). Although the primitive technology did eventually evolve, work in the silver mines was overall energy inefficient and labor intensive (Schulten 1970).

Many resources were utilized in the process of purifying the lead sulfide ore removed from the earth. The process of producing pure silver required large amounts of

⁷ “To meet the growing needs of silver and gold as payments for imports from the East, and also of iron and manufactured items for sale to the rest of the conquered territories and colonies, mines were developed in Spain, Gaul and Great Britain,” (Chew 2001, 80; Howgego 1992).

energy and water. K.D. White, historian of technology, describes that during the extraction of silver,

“the lead sulphide ore as extracted from the mine was first roasted to get rid of some of the sulphur, and then heated to a higher temperature, which further reduced the sulphur content, allowing the lead-silver alloy to form at the bottom of the furnace, where the charcoal prevented it from being oxidized. To remove the lead, the alloy was then melted in a porous crucible, and exposed to a blast of air, which oxidized and removed the lead” (White 1984, 124).

The lead-silver alloy created by the removal of the sulfur from the lead sulphide ore would contain “something between 20 and 200 ounces of silver per ton, the latter being the highest figure estimated for the Laurion mines” (Strong 1966, 3).⁸ Lead is the by-product of silver purification. There are 32,000 ounces in one ton. For every one ounce of silver extracted from the lead-silver alloy, at least 31,800 ounces are not silver, but lead. Therefore, approximately ninety-nine percent of the material removed from the earth was discarded as waste. The humans enslaved under the Roman rule utilized their energies producing much waste and a bit of silver to compensate for luxury items of social status.

By the first century BC the possession of silver was a symbol of status in Rome. Citizens ate from dishes and tableware of silver, passed gifts of silver plate, and collected silver coins. In the larger households, slaves worked in teams to polish and clean the family's collection of silver items (Strong 1966, 125). Strong references that, “there was hardly any family that did not possess some item of table silver and to have been brought up in a family that had none was a sign of the most abject poverty” (Strong 1966, 124).

⁸ The Laurion mines in Attica were the most productive in the early Empire, operating 2000 shafts that extended into the Earth a depth of 250 feet (Strong 1966).

Rome had established a core economy based on silver production. The silver trade created employment for many freedmen and slaves. For example, large firms such as Clodius, Furnius, and Grattius required a very large staff, and small craftsmen as well practiced their independent silver-smithing trade. People worked as silver polishers, silver casters, and silver gilders (Strong 1966). Silver was widely available to the Roman citizen, regardless of its geographic distance from the city of Rome and the inefficiency of its production process.

Its continued production reflects the exploitative characteristics of Roman social reproduction. The instrumental value⁹ of lead sulfide was significant enough to the Romans that they expended immense amounts of labor hours and energy¹⁰ removing it from the Earth and extracting its silver at the periphery; transporting the silver extracted from it for manufacturing at the core; then exchanging the coinage manufactured from the silver with the Far East for luxury items.

Shifting through the earth for lead sulfide transformed the landscape, and its purification process utilized excessive amounts of resources. However, silver was the basis of Roman trade, and a symbol of status in the Roman social interaction. The cultural expectation of continued silver production had aligned its possession with power and privilege.

Roman slavery

The Romans also practiced an imbalanced interaction with communities in the

⁹ Instrumental value theory delineates three distinct approaches: unrestrained exploitation and expansionism, resource conservation and development, and resources preservation (Fox 1990).

¹⁰ One metric ton of silver required between five hundred and one thousand hours of labor (Chew 2001).

peripheral zone. The urban centers actively relied on maintaining a large population of slave laborers. The utilization of slavery mirrors the accelerated consumption of material wealth within the city of Rome. At the close of the first century BC, 100,000 new slaves were needed each year, but by the second century AD, that number had increased to 500,000. During those years, nearly every Roman household owned at least one slave while some of the most privileged households possessed at least 500 (Bradley 1994; Garnsey 1987). To maintain this necessary supply of slaves, the Romans had to rely on military conquest.

The silver mines alone required slave labor. The Spanish population was reported to have been horribly mistreated and forced to work in the silver mines after the Romans began their occupation (Frank 1970). The New Carthage mines alone necessitated 40,000 slaves, kept mostly in chains (Bradley 1994; Schulten 1970).¹¹ From the Carthaginian war the supply of slaves was ensured and it is likely that most of the slaves were Iberians that were captured and used for the silver mines (Schulten 1970).

Further Roman wars provided access to even more potential slaves (Bradley 1994). In the third century BC, a war at Carthage brought 20,000 slaves; in the second century BC, another war at Carthage enslaved 55,000 people while Septimius Severus in one of his campaigns took 100,000 people at Ctesiphon; and in the first century BC, 44,000 members of an Alpine tribe, the Salassi, were sold into slavery (Bradley 1994). The urban civilization of the Roman Empire clearly relied upon the “coercive extraction of surpluses from the unfree labor of the countryside” to reproduce its daily activity

¹¹ Polybius reported 40,000 slaves in chains during his visit to the silver mines of New Carthage (Schulten 1970, 65).

(Chew 2001; 240). As peripheral tribes and states were conquered, they became slaves of Rome.¹²

When a woman was enslaved by the Romans, all her children were to be slaves as well (Bradley 1994). Children of slave women took their status from their mothers. Natural reproduction was thus another means for Rome to maintain its supply of labor. Demographic data from the second century AD illustrates a great increase of the slave population in Italy due to natural childbirth. Furthermore, Columella, a Roman soldier and writer, believed that “female slaves should be rewarded for bearing children and said that he himself had given a mother of three time off from work and a mother of more than three children her freedom as well” (Bradley 1994, 34). Encouraging enslaved women to reproduce provided slaves from which the masters could acquire profit.

Slaves were also obtained through long-distance trade. Through this slave trade, humans were reduced to mere merchandise and were treated like livestock. Records indicate that the areas to the east and to the west of the Black Sea had provided Rome with captured slaves since as early as the seventh century BC (Bradley 1994). Moreover, a trader’s handbook from the first century AD indicated that the ports of Malao and Opone exported slaves from Egypt. Finally, in Gaul in the first century AD, perhaps as many as 15,000 slaves each year were exchanged for Italian wine (Bradley 1994). Humans captured through conquest and domination were like commodities exchangeable in the expanding Roman marketplace.

Records reveal that Roman slaves worked in every type of job available to the

¹² It is important to note that mass genocide was often employed as well. See Bradley 1994 for further discussion concerning genocide and Roman economic policy.

free citizen; no occupation was closed to slaves (Bradley 1994; Garnsey 1987). The slaves even were able to accept promotions and learn new on-site responsibilities (Bradley 1994). The economic reproduction of Rome engendered the commodification of the human body.

The Political Structure

City Councils

Economic reproduction relied on administrative efficiency. The cities within the Roman Empire were essential for the maintenance of the imperial government. The city not only fulfilled the function of updating the local records for imperial administration, but also provided the citizens with all the amenities of urban life (Garnsey 1987; Jones 1966). Since the survival of the cities and the upkeep of the imperial government were so closely connected, the economic and political base of the city had to be adequately preserved (Garnsey 1987). Most of the cities, then, “were simply the governmental and social centers of their territories. In them [lived] the wealthier of the local landowners, who formed the city council, the bishop with his clergy, [and] the *defensor* with perhaps a few barristers. They also served as market towns for their neighborhoods, buying the produce of the peasants and selling them such manufactured goods as the village craftsman could not produce,” (Jones 1966, 239). The city was the economic center as well as the administrative core to enforce the regulations of the imperial government.

Policies in the cities, enforced under governance from the city council, were not easily altered. The governing body of the city was the Council, and its role was to

conserve the existing status quo, which also maintained the consolidation of material power. The qualifications for membership into the Council were stringent; free birth, origin or domicile in the city, and extensive property ownership were required (Jones 1966, 243). The hereditary structure of political involvement in conjunction with the high rate of taxation upon the impoverished prevented much opportunity for upward mobility into City Council, and so the policies of the city remained fairly conservative (Jones 1962).

The primary role of the City Council was to preserve the existing structure of taxation. Without the tax, certain amenities such as public buildings, water works, and free food for the Roman “plebs” in the city would deteriorate. In fact, “the interests and needs of the Roman government were few. Apart from war and diplomacy, its basic concern was to supply and finance the military, bureaucracy and court,” (Garnsey 1987). As long as the rural people succumbed to their heavy burden of taxation and rent, the Roman government could sustain their military presence and could pacify their citizens with an ongoing and inexpensive (if not free) supply of food and goods. A citizen of the Roman Empire was fairly comfortable, especially when contrasted against a non-citizen tax or rent harvester.

The Aristocracy

Rome was an imperial city. It reproduced itself not by producing and selling any sort of manufactured commodity, agricultural food, or exchangeable service, but it

“[derived] its maintenance rather on the basis of a legal claim such as taxes or rents, without having to deliver return values. The essential power and truth of

the consumer city model can be admitted; so can its role of confirming the supremacy of agriculture in the economy. The city was both the base of the major landowners, who were also the wealthiest residents, and the center and focus of their expenditures, which were funded in large part by their rural investments,” (Garnsey 1987, 49).

Rome, inhabited by wealthy aristocracy with investments in agricultural land, supplied itself with food and goods taxed from the peasants farming the rented land, and from the labor of the slaves. The high rate of taxation ensured that the power stayed concentrated in the hands of the aristocracy.

The wealthy men of the Empire, the members of the aristocracy, belonged to the most socially privileged class. Their wealth was through land-ownership, and it granted them opportunity for social mobility where the lower-classes labored consistently until death (Shelton 1988). This land-owning aristocracy “seldom worked the land themselves; the farming was done by slaves, indentured servants, hired free men, or sharecroppers. The landowner lived in the city and visited his property occasionally,” (Shelton 1988, 7). By very virtue of owning agricultural land, the aristocrat was in a social position of inflated privilege.

This privilege enabled the wealthy minority to seek eventual membership into the Roman Senate. They served as legal advisors, judges, magistrates, diplomats, military officers, priests, and senators, but aspired to membership in the Roman Senate. The Roman Senate controlled the domestic and foreign affairs of Rome, and indirectly exerted power over the entire Empire (Shelton 1988, 7). “Once admitted into the Senate, a man was a member for life, and he and his family were said to belong to the senatorial class or order. Since only a limited number of men had the time and money to pursue

senatorial careers, a handful of families controlled Rome and the Empire for generation after generation,” (Shelton 1988, 8). The aristocracy, then, maintained a strong-hold on the actions of the Empire. Thus, the policies of the Empire were riddled in tradition and conservative-ism.

The Imperial Government

The imperial government learned that in order for it to fulfill its function, strategic peace was as important a military action. Rome adopted a policy of supplying free food to the citizens as a political maneuver to silence any protest from the masses (Boak 1955, 66). During the years of the Late Republic, the Roman government “adopted the policy of issuing a monthly allowance of free wheat to the poorer citizens residing in Rome itself. The first emperor, Augustus, would not risk the unpopularity of abolishing this dole, and thereafter the government was saddled with the burden of supplying free grain to an essentially nonproductive proletariat numbering about 200,000.... Septimus Severus [then] supplemented the grain dole with an allowance of oil, also at the expense of the state... Much later in the same century, Aurelian introduced the practice of issuing loaves of bread in place of the unmilled wheat, continued or revived oil dole, and also provided allowances of pork and salt, as well as wine at reduced prices,” (Boak 1955, 66). Furthermore, private ship owners who agreed to transport cargo from the periphery areas to the city were even granted exemptions from certain taxations, and were awarded concessions typically reserved for the parents of three children, and were even merited with Roman citizenship if actually foreign-born (Garnsey 1987). The Roman

government had much interest in keeping the Roman “plebs” physically satisfied. To restrict the privilege of inexpensive food and goods from the citizens would result in massive uprising and disorder; its decision to cause extensive shortage in one location and surplus in another was a political maneuver to maintain the consolidation of power in the hands of the ruling aristocracy.

Tacitus, a writer and friend of the younger Pliny from Rome, remembers the uprising which resulted from a pending famine in Rome. He writes:

[In A.D. 32] a revolution almost occurred because of a serious problem with the grain supply. For several days, protests in the theater, protests directed toward the emperor, were more frequent and more outspoken than usual.¹³ The emperor was infuriated and blamed the magistrates and the Senate because they had not kept the common people in check with the authority vested in them as public servants ... [In A.D. 51] a shortage of grain and the resulting famine were regarded as prodigies. And the complaints of the people were not kept low or private. Instead they surrounded Claudius with angry clamoring when he was in court hearing cases; then they pushed and shoved him roughly to the very edge of the Forum until he escaped the hostile mob with the help of a band of soldiers. It was learned that the city had only fifteen days of grain left. Only the benevolence of the gods and the mildness of the winter relieved this desperate situation,” Tacitus, *Annals*, 6.13, 12.43 (quoted from Shelton 1988, 137).

The Roman government wanted to perpetuate its existence. To meet that goal, it required wealth consolidated in the hands of the few (Shelton 1988). Those hands, though, had the responsibility of feeding the masses. If the government denied this responsibility, the masses would revolt. It was therefore in the best interest of the government to supply food to the Romans, taxed from the rural peasants (Boak 1955). The Romans living in Rome inhabited a very comfortable existence, and the culture of consumerism was prevalent throughout the social history of the city.

¹³ The emperor at this time was Tiberius.

Consumption Habits

Social expectations

Rome was a very expensive city in which to live. Housing, dining, and entertainment were very expensive activities. Juvenal, a poet from Rome, states that, “If you can tear yourself away from the chariot races in Rome, the finest home in Sora or Fabrateria or Frusino can be bought outright for as much as you now pay in a year's rent for your dark hovel,” (Juvenal, *Satires* 3.223-225, quoted from Shelton 1988). This passage illuminates both the appeal of the city, as well as its cost. Although Rome offered the citizen endless games and events, the quality of living was substandard to a country estate or villa in an outlying area of Italy.

Not only was the highest level of comfort in the city expensive, but also were the requirements for upper-crust social expectation tremendously excessive. In Rome, the citizen was either “very rich indeed, rich enough to lavish wine, food and entertainment on thousands of guests at a single feast, to have hundreds of oxen, pigs and sheep butchered, to hire scores of carriages with their coachmen and horses,” or the wealth “was of no use to him whatsoever and he might just as well be poor,” (Dupont 1993, 31). If the man could not afford to throw lavish parties or to bath himself and his family in the luxury of aristocracy, then his worth was not of enough value to escort him into the upper class. Since the upper classes were where the power was consolidated, wealth had no value when it was in the hands of one less than the aristocracy.

The Romans valued expensive status symbols. Juvenal makes light of the

burdensome social expectations in the city. He jokes that, “it is hard for men to rise whose worth is crushed by pinching poverty, but at Rome their struggle is harder than elsewhere. What a price for the meanest lodging! What a price for servants' rations! What a price for a modest little dinner! And here you blush to eat off earthenware, which you will deny is any disgrace, if suddenly transported to live among the Marsi or eat at a Sabine board. There, too, you'd be well content to wear the green county cape,” (White 1977, 49). He pays heed to the stark contradictions between city and county life, but more so does he reference the level of anticipation for appropriate dress and accessory between and among the Roman citizens.

The Roman citizen not only had to own the necessary garments and dinner-ware; slavery was another form of visible and quantifiable wealth. Owning at least one household slave was a fundamental symbol of enviable property. Often, a Roman would own at least one, even if it was beyond his reasonably realistic income (Jones 1966, 297). The Romans valued the status of expensive material existence.

The Romans consumed garments, dinner-ware, and people, but these objects arrived to them after considerable humanitarian costs. It was the war culture that delivered such material success to the Roman society (Boak 1955, 50). These wars

rendered “the whole Roman plebs” a “privileged category,” (Garnsey 1987). The privilege, however, derived from the destructive habits of the Roman government.

The Benefits of War

The plunder of war allowed for the perpetuation of Roman culture. War, though not economically obligatory, “was culturally essential since the surplus that it brought into Rome was itself necessary not only to furnish collective festivities but also to maintain the city's level of expenditure, to finance the construction of public monuments, the upkeep of the temples, the building of roads, and to pay for public services; it was essential, in other words, to the *res publica*, the precise meaning of which might be rendered 'public property',” (Boak 1955, 50). The citizens of Rome thus benefited from the wars conducted by Rome.

Consumption catalyzed the completion of a war campaign (Dupont 1993). During these festivities, “the waste was willful and wanton: when people gorge themselves no more, whole sides of meat as yet untouched would be heaved into the Tiber. The entire populace, all classes jumbled together, would delight both in the favor of the gods and in the opulence flowing from the wealth of the nobility and from the spoils of war, two sources of happiness that were often hard to distinguish,” (Dupont 1993, 49). Although the class disparities among the citizens in Rome were overlooked during these types of celebrations, an even larger gap between the wealthy and the impoverished was illuminated. While the Romans feasted, the plundered starved.

Similarly, while the Romans were untaxed yet reaped the benefits of taxation, the rural peasants were overtaxed while granted no amenities (Dupont 1993). War successes in the mid-second century B.C. had salvaged the citizens of Rome from any present or future taxation. The victory over Perseus, the last king of Macedonia in 167 B.C. allowed the citizens of the city of Rome to be forever free from further taxation. They celebrated with a three day victory procession where “people erected statues,” and where “every temple was open and filled with garlands and incense,” (Plutarch *Aemilius Paullus* quoted in Dupont 1993, 51). Plutarch offers a detailed recording of the festivity. On each day, treasures from the plunder were paraded through the streets of Rome while the citizens cheered in praise and celebration. Day one exhibited the stolen cultural tools of Macedonian statues, paintings and “colossal” figurines; day two paraded the stolen military tools of “the finest and richest” Macedonian arms, shields and breastplates and then multitudes of vessels filled with silver coins; finally, day three paraded the stolen economic tools of “120 stall-fed oxen with gilded horns, bedecked with fillets and garlands,” and then marched Perseus, his son and daughter, followed by “a throng of foster parents, teachers and tutors, all in tears, stretching out their hands to the spectators and teaching the children to beg and supplicate,” (quoted in Dupont 1993, 51-52). This event connected the culture of war with the culture of consumption, and at no point until the fifth century AD were the two disunited.

Wars in general supplied the annual private and public games available to the Romans (Dupont 1993). The fate of some prisoners of war was finalized through participation in these games. For the Romans, who “sought more from war than the

heady but fleeting enjoyment of proving themselves the better fighters,” pillage recovered more than silver, slaves, and gold; the games were another symbolic conquest of hegemonic triumph. The governmental policy of “annexation and conquest turned enemy peoples into perpetually vanquished tribute-payers, at least until they gained a right to Roman citizenship,” (Dupont 1993, 53). War was a plunder for cultural as well as economic supremacy in the Roman world.

The objects of Roman warfare benefited both the citizens and the overall function of the cities that orchestrated the local activities for the imperial government. The cities maintained the peace through continuously suppressing pending protest, while the citizens reaped the benefits of zero taxation and increased construction of public infrastructure. For distribution of this war plunder, and taxation and rent produce, the Romans relied upon a network of well-constructed roads throughout Italy and the entire Empire. These roads “allowed the Romans to communicate quickly with any part of the Empire and to transport supplies, businessmen, messengers, bureaucrats, or military troops cheaply and safely,” (Shelton 1988, 68). The construction of these roads not only allowed for fluid transport of pillage or heftily-taxed foods, but also altered the landscape in profound ways. One inscription found on a milestone in the lower Danube area reads, “The emperor Caesar Nerva Trajan Augustus Germanicus ... had this road built. Its construction involved cutting through mountains and leveling irregularities,” (quoted in Shelton 1988, 69).¹⁴ Another inscription found on another milestone in North Africa reads that “the emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Augustus Antoninus Pius ...

¹⁴ Trajan was Emperor A.D. 98-117.

repaired this road through the Numidian Alps which deteriorated through age.

Construction work involved rebuilding bridges, draining swamps, and reinforcing sections which were sinking,” (quoted in Shelton 1988, 69).¹⁵ The Roman government had enough vested interest in maintaining civil order in the cities in general and in Rome in particular, that they were willing to extend massive expenses to ensure that supplies were transported to the appropriate places. The political interest was for comfort in the city of Rome

The people who lived in Rome were granted many amenities from the government. Water was delivered free of charge to the citizens through a system of elaborate aqueducts (Shelton 1988, 65). The state, however, maintained a close watch over this free-flowing supply of water. Frontinus, in *The Aqueducts of Rome*, advises that, “concerning the right to pipe in water to private homes, he [the water commissioner] must watch carefully that no one does so without a written authorization from the emperor, that is, that no one draws off public water which he has not been officially authorized to, and that no one draws off more than he has been authorized to...The water commissioner must exercise great vigilance against many forms of fraud,” (quoted in Shelton 1988, 66). It is possible that perhaps the water commissioner should guard against a false sense of surplus water among the Roman citizens, hence Frontinus' warnings of possible fraud. Although the government provided amenities, the reason for them was to ensure political stability and shortage would defeat the illusion of ultimate triumph so valued among the Roman citizenry.

¹⁵ Antoninus Pius was emperor A.D. 138-161.

The Romans expected their government to provide them with material supplies, in the same way that they expected each other to reflect the appropriate social status. Food and goods were widely circulated among the ancient world, and many times found their way to the city of Rome (Shelton 1988; Garnsey 1987). Aelius Aristides, an orator from Greece, writes that,

large continents lie all around the Mediterranean, and from them, to you [the people of Rome] flow constant supplies of goods. Everything is shipped to you, from every land and from every sea-the products of each season, of each county, of each river and lake, the crafts of Greeks and other foreigners. As a result, if anyone wants to see all these items, he must either travel through the whole world to behold them, or live in this city. Everything that is grown or manufactured by each people is not only always present here, but is present in abundance. So many ships land here bringing cargo from all over, during every season, after every harvest. And thus the city seems like a common market for the world,” (Aelius Aristides, *In Praise of Rome* 200, 201 (349-351) quoted in Shelton 1988, 139-140).

The Roman city required the products of the entire known world to reproduce its existence (Garnsey 1987). The accelerated transport of foods and goods from the periphery to the core city was a necessary feature of Roman life. Materials were sent to Rome to be consumed, and the Roman citizens were trained for consumption: “Urban populations throughout the empire formed additional, multiple, focal points of consumer demand...A large number of non-productive consumers were supported by increased food production...There was no radical readjustment of the priorities of the urban elites away from the traditional goals of conspicuous consumption, social status and political honor towards profitable investment,” (Garnsey 1987). Any available profit was spent on maintaining the material status quo; the aristocrats were not interested in active entrepreneurship or risky business ventures. They were more interested in perpetuating

the activities of lavish parties and festivities, and thus the actions of the imperial government continued unchallenged and unabated.

Although the first and second century AD have been considered prosperous, it was a time of great division between the rich and the poor. The rich became richer, while the poor became even poorer (Garnsey 1987). Agriculture built the foundation of the economy and, “for subsistence farmers the margin of surplus production was narrow and was largely siphoned off by the imperial authorities and city-based landlords in taxes and rents. The workers on the larger estates, whether they were technically slave or free, did not share the profits and standards of living of the landowners. The rich, for their part, were consumers rather than investors of wealth,” (Garnsey 1987, 51).¹⁶ The wealthy used their riches for perpetuation of their own ego, to reproduce their own identity of class status, instead of acquiring an interaction of equity and balanced distribution of available resources. Much of the wealth, then, recirculated among the hands of the powerful aristocracy.

Furthermore, the Roman lifestyle of excessive consumption manifested ecological imbalance. Conquest and domination had negatively impacted the short term and long term cycles of earth and human rhythm.

Resource Shortages

Deforestation was a lingering issue for the Empire by the second century BC. Increased military invasion had depleted many forests; the Roman army was largely

¹⁶ The rich consumed so much, in fact, that money-lending to them was highly unproductive. They more often spent borrow funds than they utilized it for property improvement and productivity.

responsible for the lack of timber resources (Chew 2001). When the army camped at night, they would first remove the cover of trees so that the enemy combatants could not hide themselves to engage in a sneak attack at night. During war campaigns in northern Gaul, for example, Caesar's legions destroyed entire forests (Chew 2001; Perlin 1989). Liguria, Umbria, Etruria, and North Africa and its surrounding provinces, all suffered from invasions and consequent deforestation (Chew 2001). The silver mines, as another example, also required tremendous resources of wood (White 1984). Purifying the silver for commercial and manufacturing purposes required repeated exposure to high temperatures. The initial process of ridding the sulphur from the lead sulphide necessitates a temperature of 327 degrees, and the later step of eliminating the lead from the lead-silver alloy demands a melting point of 621.43 degrees (White 1984). Wood was the primary resource utilized when maintaining these high temperatures (Chew 2001).

Furthermore, the urbanized lifestyle of the Romans consumed great quantities of wood. Residential housing, furniture, household items, balconies, ceilings, galleries, roofs, and aqua ducts were all timber based products. Also, wood was used to heat baths and villas (Chew 2001). Chew references that, "to maintain temperatures between 130 and 160 degrees Fahrenheit for a single public bath, 114 tons of wood were required per year, and for central heating of a Roman villa, more than two cords of wood per day were needed," (Perlin 1989, 112). Trees were understood as instruments of raw material. They were lavishly consumed until the land mass was deforested.

By the second century AD many of the forests were gone. They had been cut down and used to reproduce daily Roman life. Deforestation then caused soil erosion, and soil erosion caused flooding, a disturbed water supply, and the collection of silt on the coastal areas (Chew 2001; Hughes 1974). The roots of the trees within the earth are like the threads that bind strips of fabric into a blanket. Remove the thread, and the blanket disintegrates.

Toxic pollutants

Mirroring the earth body, the human body endured disease as well. Many Roman citizens were exposed to lead and fell ill (White 1984). Lead was abundant in Roman society, as it is a by-product of silver production. The people used it for water pipes and containers, pots or their internal plating, cups, toys, statuettes, tokens, coins, lids, sieves, household repairs, solder, paint, cosmetics, external medicines, boxes, lead pencils, writing tablets, coffins and roofing (Chambers 1970). Ignorant to the harmful impacts of their accumulation process, the Romans willingly exposed themselves to poison and risked slow decay.

Lead poisoning emits no directly visible symptoms (Chambers 1970). In small doses, it harmlessly collects in the bones; continued contact, however, brings a sickness with indicators such as anemia, pallor, emaciation, loss of appetite, joint pain, headache,

insomnia, blindness, and mental disturbance. Lead may not reach levels in the bones fatal to the human for at least 20 years, but the sickness is chronic and painful (Chambers 1970).

The suspended consequences of their actions kept the Romans distanced from the material cause of their physical suffering.

Deforestation and lead poisoning were nearly immediate effects of an exploitative interaction between the Roman culture and the natural world. Long term consequences have played out as well. An analysis of the lead content in ice caves can reveal the quantity of the mineral consumed during various points in history (Hong et. al. 1994). A team of scientists studied the ice caves in Greenland discovered that the concentration of lead is nearly four times greater than natural value between the years 500 BC and AD 300. This suggests that Roman lead and silver mining polluted the troposphere during the centuries of its expansionary trajectory (Hong et. al. 1994).

Unequal Distribution of Wealth

Stratification in the city

Social stratification reflected the unequal surplus accumulation in the Roman world. The want among the lower classes mirrors the wealth among the upper classes. While the aristocracy lived in luxury, some families of the lower classes “lived at bare subsistence level” and “others lived simply but comfortably,” (Shelton 1988, 10).

Although the annual census measured the wealth of each citizen, the difference between the rich and the poor “was not a quantifiable matter of money. They [the rich and the

poor] were separated by an abyss: the words 'rich' and 'poor' meant different things to each of them [the Roman citizens]" (Dupont 1993, 30).

The members of the aristocracy, and especially those within the senatorial class, believed entirely that, by virtue of their inherited wealth, they were intellectually and morally superior to the classes beneath them (Shelton 1988). Their justification was that competency in government derived from wealth, and the lower-classes could not afford to spend their time in the unpaid public service position with the Senate. The wealthy members of Rome then maintained their conviction that they were by far superior to the poor. Cicero records that, "when such men[as the aristocrats] watch over the state, the citizens must necessarily be very happy and blessed, since they are free of anxiety and care and have entrusted their security to others whose duty it is to guard this security and never to act in such a way that the people think their best interests are being neglected by their rulers," (Cicero, *About the Republic*, quoted from Shelton 1988, 11). The general Roman attitude was that the wealthy were more likely to invest their energies in providing amenities to the "plebs" than were the poor.

In a highly stratified society such as what existed at Rome, even the various occupations were hierarchically organized. Cicero, in *As Essay about Duties*, records the vulgarity associated with multiple tasks. He acknowledges that "those occupations [that] are condemned which bring upon you people's hatred, such as tax collecting and usury" are inappropriate occupations for gentlemen. He includes also retail merchants, paid labor, all craftsmen, and "those which cater to our sensual pleasures, 'fish sellers,

butchers, cooks, poultry raisers, and fishermen,' as Terence says.¹⁷ Add to these, if you like, perfume makers, dancers, and all of vaudeville.” Regardless of how necessary these occupations are for the function of the city and the marketplace, only the poor should have to face the disgrace of selling their labor in these daily activities. Cicero continues to record that the positions of “no small service to society-such medicine or architecture or teaching of liberal arts-these are proper for men whose social position they suit.” Further included is large scale trade; “importing many different items from throughout the world, and bringing many things to many people” is one of the few socially acceptable occupations (Cicero, *An Essay about Duties*, quoted in Shelton 1988, 129-130). The general idea was that the wealthy were not to toil but to volunteer their time in public service, while the poor were to labor in the endless work necessary for the function of the city and the marketplace. The wealthy were socialized to be superior to physical work.

This meant, however, that little has been recorded regarding the everyday lives of the lower-class Roman citizens. Since they toiled in menial jobs to maintain their existences in the expensive city of Rome, they were uneducated and lacked the resources to record their thoughts and feelings. Much of the current information has been derived from pictorial sources such as mosaics, wall-paintings, and reliefs rather than written documentation (Shelton 1988, 131). What has been determined is that the life of the lower-class urban worker was not as comfortable as the life of the aristocrat. In fact, the life of the worker was quite harsh indeed. Their wages were low, the prices in the city

¹⁷ Terence was a writer of Roman comedy during the second century B.C.

were high, and many jobs were temporary and quickly replaced with cheaper, even slave labor. Free workers did not receive job security, retirement benefits, medical plans, and unemployment insurance (Shelton 1988, 136). In many ways, being a slave was much better than being a free urban laborer, as a slave was provided with shelter, clothing, and adequate foods.

For the most part, wheat was the primary food product consumed by the poor Romans (Shelton 1988). Many of the members in the lower-class ate little more than wheat. They either crushed it or boiled it in water to make porridge, or they baked it as bread, although most lack the easy access to a private oven. While the wealthy ate a variety of meats, vegetables, cheeses, and fruits, the poor were confined to government supplied wheat, and a limited amount of beans, leeks, and sheep's lips (Shelton 1988, 82). The differences in the quality of life between the rich and the poor in Rome are reflected in the difference of diet.

Stratification in the countryside

The difference between the rich and the poor in the city is parallel to the difference between the citizens of Rome and the peasants in the rural countryside. For instance, while the Roman citizens received grain doles from the imperial government, the same grain collection created shortage among those who grew and harvested the food. The peasants suffered extreme shortage of the basic necessities of life under the Roman policy of food distribution among the citizens in the city. In their condition of near-starvation, the peasants were forced to consume whatever edible material they could

scavenge, although they had grown and harvested a large quantity of healthy foods.

Syria, Mesopotamia, and Italy record a number of extensive famines, due in large part to the imperial taxes and aristocratic rents. Since “the Roman world in general lived from hand to mouth, and very rarely carried over stocks from one season to another ... even in a famine year taxes and rents were exacted from the peasants, though they might have nothing left to eat,” (Jones 1966, 295). The purpose of the government was to supply those who lived in the cities and who maintained the bureaucratic function of the imperial state, not to feed the hungry or to ensure the well-being of the peasant class.

Even in a time of comparative surplus, the peasant diet was far more restricted than anyone in the city of Rome. *Moretum* was a food item widely eaten among the poor. “It consisted of a medley of vegetables and herbs, ground together and mixed with vinegar, oil (if available), and sometimes cheese (if available). The poor, who often could not afford oil and cheese, mixed whatever plants, domestic or wild, were available to them,” (Shelton 1988, 161). *Moretum* is also the name of a tale written by an anonymous poet. The narrative describes the task of a peasant farmer preparing food for a day of consumption. It highlights the subsistence existence of daily life for this class of human, and invokes a sense of lonely and meager simplicity. An excerpt:

And now night had completed twice five hours, and the winter sentry announced the new day with his crowing. Simulus, the peasant farmer of a meager little plot, worried about gnawing hunger on this coming day ... He unlocked the cupboard door with a key. Spread out on the cupboard floor was a paltry pile of grain. From this he took for himself as much as his measuring bucket held ... While it [the bread] baked, Simulus was not idle. He worked at another task, lest bread alone would not satisfy his hunger, and he prepared another dish to eat with the bread ... Simulus happily took a piece [of bread and *moretum*] in his hand. Now that he had put aside the fear of hunger and was free of anxiety, at least for this

day, he tied leggings on his legs, covered his head with a leather cap, yoked his obedient oxen, drove them into the field, and sank his plow into the earth. (quoted in Shelton 1988, 162-63).

Simulus awoke from his slumber with anxieties of food on his mind. After scrapping together his scant food supplies, he is happy to have enough to bake bread and to mix the *moretum*. Although the ingredients of this blend consist of little more than oil and herbs, it seemed to offer Simulus enough food product to allow him to maintain his work on the farm to pay his tax and rent.

However tough the life was for the rural peasant, the Roman upper-class consistently romanticized the moral virtues of a country existence. In their writings and attitude, the senators “extolled” the simplicity of the peasant farmer and “praised” him for being “austere but happy,” (Shelton 1988, 153). These same senators, however, were also the landowners, the politicians, and the statesmen, but they did little to assist the peasant farmer in his most desperate struggle by the end of the republican period (Shelton 1988).¹⁸ The policies of hefty rent and taxation burdened the peasant farmer.

Rent and Taxation

The burden upon the peasants

The initial motivation behind the farming of the rural agricultural land was to provide labor for the poorest people in the city of Rome, to build up the Italian stock during the centuries of the early Republic. Over the years, however, due to high levels of taxation and the burden of scattered famine and shortages, the population of the rural

¹⁸ Country life was of such high moral ideal that the consumption of anything grown in Italian soil was above sumptuary laws enforced to discourage luxury. For more discussion see Dupont 1993.

Italians decreased instead of increased, and the wealth generated from the productive agricultural land was consistently consolidated in the hands of the few landowners (White 1977, 87). Appian records that “anyone willing to work it [the rural land] might do so against a charge on the annual crops, consisting of ten per cent of the sown, and twenty percent of the planted crops. On those who kept animals a charge was levied for both large and small cattle,” (Appian, from *Civil Wars*, quoted in White 1977, 87). The peasants were further charged a rent fee from the landowners to work the land alongside their rate of taxation. These expenses were burdensome, and many peasants had to supplement their diet with wild herbs and grasses after having paid taxes and rents (Shelton 1988). Food shortages began in the mid-second century A.D and by the early third century, the circumstances were approaching dire (Jones 1966; Boak 1955).

The burden was fairly widespread, and the peasant farmers as far west as Britain were affected negatively by the rising crisis in the third century. Archaeological records reveal that Britain began to export woolen garments. This data suggests that “an extension of sheep raising, which required far fewer farms hands than were needed for tillage” had arisen among peasants struggling to survive after paying the imperial taxation and the landowner rent. At other points in geography and history, an expansion of the sheep industry indicates “a decline in the area of cultivated land and an accompanying decrease in the rural population, interacting as cause and effect,” (Boak 1955, 37). We will discuss the various conditions of worker shortage in the section to follow.

The general supply of grain to the city of Rome put strain on the agricultural areas of the Empire.¹⁹ This policy of free food, extended by later emperors and combined with an increase in the amount of tax and rent-grain, “brought stability to the system of supply, and ensured that Rome would avoid dangerous shortages except in conditions of civil war,” (Garnsey 1987, 86). It did nothing, however, to protect the peasant from the circumstances of shortage, famine, toil, weather, or sickness. While the citizens of Rome basked in the comfort of food distribution, the peasant farmers cleared and plowed the land; planted, hoed, pruned, weeded, irrigated and harvested the crops of grapes, olives, vegetables, and fruit; they fed, cleaned, bred, raised, sheared, milked, and slaughtered goats, cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and draft horses; they built barns, fences, and sheepfolds; they cut firewood; they made and repaired tools and equipment; all this labor to meet the requirements of tax for the imperial government and rent for the wealthy landowners (Shelton 1988). “Exhausting toil and grinding poverty were the lot of the peasant farmer,” (Shelton 1988, 161).

The growing shortage of agricultural laborers

Poverty conditions became too tough to endure, and the peasants began to desert the agricultural land in the late third century A.D. (Jones 1966). In response to this pending labor shortage, consolations were made by the landowners. Pliny records his attempts to reconcile the price of rent with his tenant farmers, so that the tax could be met and the land could continue to be cultivated. He writes that “during the past five years, in

¹⁹ “War contributed to public wealth, and it seemed natural to the nobility, who were in a way the depositories of collective wealth, that they would have the lion's share: just as it seemed perfectly natural to them to use public land for rearing herds of animals destined for feasts,” (Dupont 1993, 50).

spite of my making considerable reductions in the rents, the arrears have increased; as a result most of my tenants have given up all concern for reducing their debts, because they have abandoned any hope of paying back what they owe; they even seize and consume the produce, convinced as they are that they will gain nothing by keeping it,” (Pliny, from *Letters*, quoted in White 1977, 92). Although Pliny had decreased his rent continuously for five years, the farmers were still in such dire conditions that they were unable to meet both rent and tax. Their hunger had reached a point where they were more interested in eating the produce than in paying off what little amount of the tax and rent that they could.

When the peasants began to desert the land, the government responded with policy reconstruction (Boak 1955). The policies, however, still protected the citizens of Rome and did not address the conditions of hunger and famine among the peasants. In the early third century A.D. laws restricting the movement of people were strictly enforced. The *coloni*, or the free born small tenant farmer, became legally bound to the farms they had been cultivating; the interaction between the landowner and the *colonus* had shifted from a contractual relationship to serfdom (Boak 1955, 48). Some provision had to be made to accommodate the replacement of each *colonus*, so the government bound each peasant family to the land they tilled and created a structure of a hereditary colonate (Boak 1955, 49). The government also restricted the freedom of the landowner to move his slaves from plot to plot as he saw fit. The slaves could no longer be sold apart from the estate where they had been previously employed (Boak 1955, 50). The food shortage was such a pressing issue in the late third century and the early fourth

century that the Roman government had to write and enforce policy limiting primarily, the freedom of the peasants, and to a lesser extent, the freedom of the landowners. The policies simply extended the inevitable, however, and the peasant farmers, with no assistance from the imperial state and thus with no other option, abandoned still the previously cultivated land that had supplied the Roman citizen with food. The consequences of these desertions soon affected the city of Rome.

Consequences of social and ecological imbalance

Much of the grain that had been distributed in Rome was grown on private property, then extracted as tax or rent (Garnsey 1987, 87). When Diocletian dramatically increased the land taxes to supply the growing demand for food in Rome, the condition of the tenant farmers, “was rendered so intolerable that they found their priorities confiscated for arrears of taxes or took to flight in fear that they would be sold out. Under such conditions of land tenure and rural taxation no opportunity to recover from a progressive decline was given to that part of the agrarian population which had managed to survive the crisis of the third century,” (Boak 1955, 35). The political motive was to project surplus supply in one location at the expense of severe shortage in another location.

Several people spoke out about the possible ramifications of this stark imbalance in the structure of the Roman society. One present spoke to the Senate in the early fourth century, explaining that, “if so many cultivators are starved, and so many farmers die, our own corn supply will be ruined for good. We are excluding those who normally supply

our daily bread,” (Ambrose, *off.* 3.45ff. quoted in Garnsey, 1987, 103). Another person, the Christian author Lactantius, recorded the direct relationship between the over taxation of the government and the pending shortage in the food supply. He claims that, “as a result of the immense load of the [land tax] the resources of the tenant farmers were exhausted and [so] they deserted their fields,” (Boak 1955, 34). Regardless of any words of warning spoken, though, the government had to continue the heavy taxation so that the citizens of Rome could maintain access to adequate food supplies.

The grain collection from the tenant farmers created the material conditions of stark imbalance between the Roman citizens and the rural peasants. Galen, a philosopher and physician from the mid-second century, records that,

the famines occurring in unbroken succession over a number of years among many of the people subject to the Romans have demonstrated clearly, to anyone not completely devoid of intelligence, the important part played in the genesis of diseases by the consumption of unhealthy foods. For among many of the peoples who are subject to the Romans, the city-dwellers, as it was their practice to collect and store enough grain for all the next year immediately after the harvest, left what remained to the county people, that is, pulses of various kinds, and they took a good deal of these too to the city. The county people finished the pulses during the winter, and so had to fall back on unhealthy foods during the spring; they ate twigs and shoots of trees and bushes, and bulbs and roots of indigestible plants, they filled themselves with wild herbs, and cooked fresh grass (VI 749ff.) (Garnsey 1987, 97).

Galen remembers the conditions of poverty in which the peasants lived. He records the shortage and hunger of their material reality, and the connection between their plight and the policy of taxation from the Roman government. It was this poverty, in conjunction with other more periphery circumstances, which influenced the desertion of the farm land and the eventual shortage and disaster in the city of Rome.

The imperial legislation addressing the cultivation of deserted agricultural lands from the middle of the third century through the end of the sixth century reveals that the area of productive land had been progressively shrinking. The primary reason for this trend has been linked to a widespread shortage of people to farm the land (Jones 1966, 304). The reasons for this labor shortage include land abandonment, disease, and war. Farming in the rugged soil of the Mediterranean required utilizing very laborious cultivation techniques. Due to the pressures of taxation and rent, many of the farmers had been tempted to skip fallow years. The soil then became exhausted and was no longer able to produce enough crops to meet its demand (Jones 19766, 306). Land abandonment soon followed crop failure. Disease also circulated among the peasant farms in the late second century and into the third quarter of the third century. The rural population was permanently reduced, and available agricultural labor was thus in short supply (Jones 1966, 207-208). The legislation was established to render further desertion of prime agricultural land unlawful, and to restrict the movement of remaining farm workers.

Even where the land was still productive and the workers still alive, shortage perpetuated. Alongside famine and disease, war and invasion also intruded into the lives of the peasant farmers in the early fourth century A.D. (Boak 1955). While only the professional soldiers were involved in any actual fighting, many peasants died as an indirect result of military operations. Although they were granted none of the benefits from conflict with neighboring tribes, the peasants bore the blunt of the barbarian wrath. The vengeful barbarians “showed no hesitation in killing or carrying off into slavery

persons who fell into their hands,” (Boak 1955, 25). They stole cows and horses, and ate livestock when on a march. Often times entire homes were burned and entire farms of animals vanished. “[There was] constant plunder of the countryside by the armies on the march. Standing crops, if ripe, would be harvested, and stores of food would be taken regularly without compensation... The net result was impoverishment and starvation in the districts where actual fighting took place,” (Boak 1955, 24). Much of the agrarian population suffered serious loss, and the supply of available labor personnel diminished too. The peasant farmers, “weakened in numbers [and] suffering from poverty and from the resultant malnutrition” lost their “ability to maintain [themselves] by natural reproduction” and the population was reduced further still (Boak 1955, 28). Without a surplus of farm workers, the Roman world found itself without food. The shortage that had been contained to one geographic location in the periphery soon spread to the core of the city at Rome.

Conclusion

Rome relied upon a network of imbalanced political, social, and ecological interactions to reproduce its very existence. Wealth, food, and political power were consolidated in the hands of the few, and the perpetuation of this stratification regenerated the ongoing material destabilization. A system transformation was imminent. The attitude of the Roman writers towards this looming crisis was fearful and persecuting. In the early fourth century, Lactantius wrote, “The fall and ruin of the world will soon take place, but it seems that nothing of the kind is to be feared as long as the

city of Rome stands intact. But when the capitol of the world has fallen...who can doubt that the end will have come for the affairs of men and the whole world? It is that city which sustains all thing,” (Kagan 1992, 17). Lactantius recognizes that Rome is the feature point of the centralized economy, but expresses a certain amount of pessimism concerning its ability to maintain stability.

The wealth generated during the perpetuation of the Roman accumulation process depleted forests, and increased diseases. The Roman system demanded access to supplies of labor to reproduce its social interaction of exchange (Schulten 1970). It maintained its supply and practiced its conquest through its use of military force and economic expansion (Frank 1970). The Roman structure of organization required expansion and this expansion required the transformation of nature and the human body. The land was a battlefield, a trade route, or a mine. The human was a soldier, a consumer, or a slave. Instability ensued.

Lucan expresses harsh condemnation with bitter chastisement at the Roman government. He states that, “if so great a lust for impious war possesses you, now that you have put the entire globe under the laws of Latium, turn your hands against yourself. You have not yet come to lack enemies ... It has been the fate of no foreigners to plumb the depths of armed conflict. The wounds of civil strife are deeply rooted ... These hands shall wreak havoc such as no generation can wipe out, nor any race of men repair, though all their years were free from the sword. This conflict will overthrow peoples that are yet to be, and, by depriving them of birth, will sweep away the nations of the generations now coming into the world,” (Lucan, from *Pharsalia*, quoted in White 1977, 88). Lucan

was correct to identify that civil struggle was to be Rome's destructor, and that the conflict would affect people for generations to come. The foresight of his prophecy, however, failed to reveal the internalized violence that would soon erupt within the cities and villages throughout the Empire.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

During this peak of environmental alteration and social inequality during the first and second century AD, Christianity emerged from the desert regions of the Empire. Its influence would extend from Jerusalem through Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome (Nickle 1980; Sordi 1986); its evolution would inspire resistance and revolt against the Roman authority (Grant 1959; Jones 1978); its eschatology would offer relief for the impoverished from the burden of material slavery (Grant 1959; Payne 1980; Filoramo 1990); its philosophy would profess interconnectivity among all beings and the Earth (Edwards 1995). Christianity in its first two centuries acted as a catalyst for grass root mobilization and uprising against the devices of Roman expansion and accumulation (Cullman 1970; Nolan 1978).

The Roman Empire celebrated wealth derived from human inequality, the plunder of neighboring populations, and the destruction of natural ecosystems (Harris 1979; Chew 2001). As Rome conquered with continuous warfare, the early Christian communities triumphed in communal peace (Cadoux 1982). During the first century A.D, the Christian movement was a mobilization and an ideology in resistance to the world of the Romans; it sought to restore the balance of a human interaction riddled with hierarchy and exploitation (Echegaray 1984; Lohfink 1984). Jesus identified the power structure of the Roman Empire “corroded by the desire for wealth” with the realm of

“Satan”(Echegaray 1984, 29).²⁰ In this perspective, the Empire and “its world of degradation, enslavement and dehumanization,” was a contradiction to the kingdom the oppressed children of God were to inhabit (Echegaray 1984, 30). After the kingdom of “Satan” is transformed into the kingdom of God, “the face of the Earth” will as well transform (Echegaray 1984, 85). For these reasons, the mobilization of Christianity in accordance with the instructions of Jesus would realign the political, social, and ecological trajectory of the existing expansionary structure of the Roman Empire (Yoder 1972; Nolan 1978; Cadoux 1982; Echegaray 1984; Lohfink 1984).

This chapter will first, identify the secondary texts that align Jesus with a movement to reinstate political sovereignty and the autonomy of Israel away from imperial rule. Second, it will discuss the primary and secondary texts that interpret the instruction of Jesus as a movement of community building to overcome the rampant social oppression under imperial rule. Finally, it will analyze primary text to conclude that ecological restoration was also intended within the instruction of Jesus along with political mobilization and social transformation. This chapter will illuminate the movement of Christianity as a complete response to the political, social, and ecological instability of the Roman Empire.

²⁰ “And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory [the glory of the kingdoms of the world], for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will,’” (Luke 4:6, quoted in Echegaray 1984, 29).

The Movement to Restore Political Balance

Much literature has been written linking the historical Jesus with revolution against Roman imperial conquest. Jesus was 12 years old when the Romans began their occupation of Israel, having deposed the previous ruler, Herod Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, due to incompetency (Nolan 1978). He would have witnessed much violence and bloodshed from the Roman army upon rebellion leaders of the Jewish faith, such as those of the Zealots and the Essenes (Nolan 1978). These Jewish leaders were interested in restoring political sovereignty to Israel so that their people were no longer subjected to the heavy taxation of labor and natural resources from the Roman officials (Echegaray 1984).

Jesus contributed to the movement of resistance against the Roman occupation (Cullman 1970). Lohfink suggests that his gathering of the twelve disciples is a symbolic reclamation of the land through the twelve tribes of Israel. During the mobilization of Jesus, only two and a half tribes remained in existence, those of Judah, Benjamin, and part of Levi, but “the complete restoration of the twelve-tribe people was expected for the eschatological time of salvation. Texts as early as the Book of Ezekiel describe a prophetic program according to which the twelve tribes, brought back to life in the last days, would receive their permanent share of the land,” (Lohfink 1984, 10).²¹ Lohfink further describes that Jesus strategically selected his disciples from different regions of the country and from different sects of Judaism so that the restoration of the lost and

²¹ Ezekiel 37; 39:23-29; 40-48.

scattered Israel would be total (Lohfink 1984, 11). The movement organized from his teachings would reclaim political sovereignty for those oppressed under Roman rule. In his life, he taught to establish a movement of autonomy among those subjected to the injustices of a kingdom with worldly power.

The cultural landscape

In the first few years following Jesus' crucifixion the mobilization efforts were limited primarily to the Jewish settlements of Galilee and Judea (Nickle 1980).²² For that reason, the community which was formed following the contested resurrection was a Christianized sect of Judaism. The members of the community continued to observe and to celebrate the Jewish worship practices and holidays, and they vindicated their belief in the resurrected Messiah with acknowledgment for the completion of the Jewish Scripture and law as recorded by Moses and the prophets (Nickle 1980). The message began to spread within the many Jewish communities that had been scattered through the 'Diaspora'.²³ Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish scholar, estimated that roughly one million Jewish people were living in Alexandria, one million were in Asia and Syria, and yet another hundred thousand were in Italy. The many Jewish Christian teachers rightfully assumed that anyone raised with this cultural tradition would recognize the custom and mythology associated with the Anointed One regardless of their geographic proximity to Jerusalem (Nickle 1980).

²² The crucifixion was regarded as a "tragically ruthless murder" that fulfilled an awaited prophecy (Nickle 1980, 13). There is little reason to assume, however, that the apostles did not believe that Jesus could have saved himself from death.

²³ Ibid. The *Diaspora* or The Dispersion are technical terms for Jewish settlement beyond Palestine.

It was during the Hellenistic Jewish mobilization when the Gentiles began to crowd within the congregations (Swett 1998). The teaching style had shifted during this phase to persuade a culture of people who had been more influenced by the Greek philosophies than the Aramaic Judaism, so the ancient traditions and laws were emphasized less, and the transformative process of resurrection was emphasized more. By A.D. 70, most of the mobilization efforts were focused on the non-Jewish people of the Greek and Roman civilization (Nickle 1980; Swett 1998). The core of spiritual activity had shifted from Israel to Rome.

Mobilizing for autonomy

Although the mobilization efforts of the Jewish Christian teachers did not impact the city of Rome until the latter half of the first century AD, the clash began years prior.²⁴ While the crucifixion is a symbol of religious mythology, it is also a material deed which established the existing relationship between worldly authority and spiritual transformation (Lohfink 1984). It is recorded in all four gospels that Jesus underwent two separate trials: one before the Sanhedrin (the cultural authority) and another before the Governor (the economic authority).²⁵ The Sanhedrin charged him with blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God and for claiming to be capable of destroying the temple to rebuild it in three days; and the governor charged him with false majesty, for obstructing the peace, and for impeding the payment of tax to Caesar (Sordi 1986). When he

²⁴ Please refer to Appendix A for a chronology of struggle between the Jewish and the Christian communities and the invading Roman Imperialists in the first century AD.

²⁵ Matthew 26:57-67; Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 12:13-17; Mark 14:46; Mark 14:53-62; Mark 15:2-10; Luke 22; 51-53; Luke 22:66- 23:3; John 2:19.

confessed that he is the Messiah, he fulfilled prophesy delivered from the Jewish law; the fulfillment of this prophesy then rendered the rituals performed and mandated by the Sanhedrin obsolete.²⁶ When he challenged the political entities that routinely applied systems of taxation upon the impoverished, he disrupted the operations of accelerated economic activity within the core of Rome.²⁷ His person was not a threat, but his teaching of autonomy from institutional doctrine could deconstruct the material conditions of state and religious sanctioned authority (Cullman 1970; Lohfink 1984).

In both instances, the accusations against Jesus deny his individual agency while assuming unquestionable hierarchy within a social order of stark injustice. At this point, it is important to note that the Jewish Sanhedrin were allowed to convict their criminals, but could not condemn to death. That decision had to come from the Roman tribunal (Sordi 1986). The execution then was carried out by the Roman authority. Although Pontius Pilate washed his hands of the interaction between this man and his religious leaders, any Roman involvement invited backlash and consequent revolt.

In the years to follow, many individuals who either called themselves prophets or who were recognized as such attempted to enforce the strategies for mobilization to overcome the strength of the Roman occupation (Grant 1959). In A.D. 6 Judas of Galilee attempted to establish a theocracy to oppose forced taxation to the Empire. He began an underground movement, forming a group referred as Zealots by the Jewish and as bandits by the Romans (Nolan 1978, 12). The movement dissolved after nearly sixty years of merciless massacres from the Roman army and thousands of crucifixions and

²⁶ Matthew 26:54-56; Luke 6:7-9; Luke 20:1-17.

²⁷ Mark 8:15; Luke 11:53; Luke 20:20-26.

assassinations of the rebel fighters (Nolan 1978, 12). Then, under the emperor Claudius during severe famine in Judaea, Theudas the Judaeen gathered hordes of hungry people at the bank of the Jordan River. There, he professed that the waters would part at his command so that all could cross. However, the Roman army beheaded him before his prophecy could materialize (Grant 1959, 29). From Egypt then under Nero came a man who was called a prophet. He led 4,000 people from the wilderness to the Mount of Olives and told them that the walls of Jerusalem would crumble at his word, and they could then take control of the city. The Roman troops had anticipated this event, and thousands were killed in the fight (Grant 1959, 29). By A.D. 66, the tensions between the people in the desert regions and the Roman occupation of those regions had catalyzed into full revolt “in spite of the efforts of the aristocracy to prevent it”; then, in A.D. 70, a fire destroyed the Jewish temple at Jerusalem (Grant 1959, 29). The Aramaic speaking Jewish Christians had experienced and had witnessed in first person the destructive characteristics of the Roman Empire.

Reconstructing the authority

These events fueled apocalyptic hopes and visions which emerged from Christian eschatology (Grant 1959). Although taught from different teachers and interpreted from different cultures, all Aramaic speaking Jewish Christians, Hellenistic Jewish Christians, and Christian Gentiles were awaiting divine intervention to renew the kingdom and to complete the cycle of history (Nickle 1980; Payne 1980). From this narrative, the tradition of the church began to align with grass root organization. It was then the

responsibility of each human being to protect the community from infiltration of worldly authority. The hungry were to be fed and the poor were to be clothed, not by an agent of institutional destruction, but by hands as reflectors of human solidarity (Payne 1980). To the Gentile Christians, the community and the church were each indistinguishable from the other.

The Movement to Restore Social Balance

During the first century A.D. the church was a community and its organizational structure reflected the belief in the oppositional relationship between Roman institutionalization and social metamorphosis (Payne 1980; Nickle 1980). Little historical data has survived, though, concerning the nature of the Christian Gentile church at this point in history.²⁸ In fact, Nickels points out that “our knowledge of the first days of the Christian church is very limited,” and that “information about the earliest stages in the life of the Christian fellowship which formed after the resurrection is meager,” (Nickle 1980, 12). The information that is available, however, produces a clear image of the social intentions of the organization; it was a network of communalism and egalitarianism linked through consensus upon transformative renewal of the interaction between humans within the existing social order of stratification and exploitation (Yoder 1972; Payne 1980; Cadoux 1982). In general, the members consciously examined their interconnectivity with each other. They were commanded not to exalt themselves or to let their souls be presumptuous; they were instructed that “with the righteous and

²⁸ Samuel Sandmel assesses the historical data from the first century in *The First Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity: Certainties and Uncertainties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

humble” they should walk and not to be “joined with the lofty,” (*The Didache* 3:9). The equal distribution of resources and the ideology of communalism would precaution against competition and dissatisfaction so that the members could more effectively practice transformation.

An oral tradition

In the first years of its organization, the church regenerated consensus through a tradition of oral storytelling (Nickle 1980). Many of the oral traditions were later reconstructed into the four synoptic gospels.²⁹ Prior to that written document, however, narratives were expounded which illuminated something of the nature of Jesus (Nickle 1980). Nickle has examined the five scholarly categories of early Christian storytelling: the pronouncement story, the miracle story, stories about Jesus as Christ, and sayings of Jesus (Nickle 1980). The pronouncement story produces a linear narrative, which first describes the setting, then clarifies an action, and finally expels a significant saying. The miracle story describes the need, the miraculous act, and the consequent results. The stories about Jesus as Christ illuminate the divinity he was believed to have possessed. Finally, the sayings of Jesus are isolated statements and separate from any larger contextual discourse (Nickle 1980, 32-45). While the formulaic structure of each narrative differed slightly depending on its content and purpose, the elucidated

²⁹*The Didache*, or, *The Teaching of the Twelve Disciples* is one of the first documents that circulated among the communities. However, the date of the original manuscript is unknown; only one has ever been discovered. In 1847, Philotheos Bryennios of the Metropolitan of Serres in Macedonia found it at the Monastery of the Most Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople. It was inscribed with the signature of “Leo the notary and sinner,” with the date of June 3, 1056 (Payne 1980). Apparently, the only copy of this manuscript to survive the centuries found its way to Constantinople. The other copies have either been lost or destroyed.

information regenerated the faith in human transformation. The oral storytelling tradition allowed each church and community to receive this message in an unadulterated language.

The narratives that circulated among the first century Christian communities provide an interpretation of Jesus as man and as divinity. One story, part of the *Acts of John*, presents an image of Jesus that is dependent upon the expectations of the onlooker (Payne 1980). John and James, sons of Zebedee, were fishing from their boat on the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw someone waving to them from the shore. According to James, the person was a “youth with but a faint down on his cheeks,” while to John, he appeared as “a bald man with a thick flowing beard,” (Payne 1980).³⁰ This story reflects the early Christian treatment of each member of humanity. When Jesus promised that everything done for a stranger would be done also for God, he was suggesting that God is in everyone. That is why his image appeared differently to the brothers James and John.³¹ Since Jesus has no consistently recognizable appearance, early Christians were taught to understand that they must treat everyone with the same kindness that they would treat the son of God; anyone they encounter could be the son of God, resurrected.

³⁰ The origin of this story is unknown. It is absent from any Gospel account of the calling of James and John, the first disciples.

³¹ Similarly, the synoptic gospels record that Jesus changed his appearance after the resurrection, so that he was unrecognizable to his disciples. Mark specifies that he “appeared in a different form,” while Luke simply suggests that the disciples “were kept from recognizing him.” (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:16).

Overcoming oppression

Jesus offered a perspective to reconstruct the existing social order, in the same way that Moses produced the law of social transformation after his visit to Mount Sinai (Lohfink 1984, 36). His teaching renounced the order established under “patriarchal domination” in favor of the law of one who governs from authority beyond the world of the Roman Empire (Lohfink 1984, 45). The intention of his reconstruction is for all members of the Christian community to “renounce all legal sanctions and all retribution. Do not answer violence with violence,” (Lohfink 1984, 52). The community he sought to establish was not to be a state or a nation, but was to be a community “which forms its own sphere of life, a community in which one lives in a different way and treats others in a different way than is usual elsewhere in the world” such as in the Roman Empire (Lohfink 1984, 56). Where the structure of domination inherent in the world promotes violent oppression and injustice, the structure of the Christian community would embrace brotherhood and reconciliation.

Fostering community

Fellowship with and hospitality for the community were essential organizational features within the early church. Since many of Jesus' instructions for social interaction include service to others (Mark 10:41; John 13:16; John 14:27; John 15:18), the members of the early church were expected to live as brothers and sisters, giving freely to each

other and welcoming all who passed through in peace.³² Payne describes the interaction within the community of the early church. He remarks that, “[the Christians] lived in small communities, in quiet piety, craving miracles, exchanging the kiss of peace, confessing their sins before every offering of the Eucharist and welcoming all those who came,” (Payne 1980, 5). The community mobilized through the teachings of Jesus sought to realign the trajectory of power from domination to service (Mark 10:42; Mark 9:35; Nolan 1978). The power exercised through Christian organization “is not a power which has to be served, a power before which a man must bow down and cringe. It is the power which has an enormous influence in the lives of men by being of service to them,” (Nolan 1978, 69). The three most fundamental rules among the early Christian communities were first, to love the creator God; second, to love others as they love themselves; and third, to not do to another what they would not do to themselves (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:28; *The Didache* 1:2). These basic premises protect the sense of communalism they strongly embraced, for the self was consistently secondary beneath another. The individual was fulfilled only as a member of a larger community.

³² “Give to everyone who asks of you, and do not demand it back; for the Father wants something from his own free gifts to be given to all. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless,” (*The Didache* 1:5).

Distributing the resources

The early Christians practiced egalitarian well-being; all could access the resources, and none developed privilege over another (Nolan 1978).³³ Paul, one of the original mobilization organizers, writes that, “all were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, [the members of the Christian communities] gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,” (Acts 2:44). Another account further recalls that, “all the believers were in one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had ... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, put it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need,” (Acts 4:32). The sense of communalism in the early Christian community presented a lifestyle in stark contrast to the stratification of the occupying Roman Empire.

The leaders within each community, those who were trusted to distribute the resources such as the apostles referenced in the above statement, were elected through democratic process based on qualities of selflessness. They were “meek and not lovers of money, true and approved,” they were “honorable men, along with the prophets and teachers,” (*The Didache*, 15:1-2). In love of money, the leaders would impose power

³³ The Gnostics who formulated a more esoteric philosophy of Christian thought practiced similar egalitarian systems of organization. Institutional hierarchy was unnecessary for the propagation of their spiritual movement. Through acceptance of the human position within the cosmic balance, any human being could evolve into *gnosis*, or knowledge (Harris 1999).

over human, but in meekness, they would deliver power through God. The leaders of the Christian communities neither claimed nor received any material advantage for their position.

Although the first century Christians avoided clearly defined hierarchy, certain community members were protected quite closely. Each member had the responsibility of productivity, but difference was recognized and all talents were valued equally.³⁴ The teachers who did not produce materials or harvest resources received goods in exchange for their prophesying. It is written:

Every true prophet who desires to settle among you is worthy of his food. Likewise, a true teacher also is worthy, but like the craftsman, he works for his living. Therefore, take the first-fruits of every product of the wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and sheep, and give it to the prophets, for they are your chief priests. And if you have no prophet, give it to the poor. If you make bread, take the first-fruits and give according to the commandment. In like manner, when you open a jar of wine or oil, take the first-fruits and give it to the prophets. Yes, and of money and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruits, as seems good to you, and give according to the commandment (*The Didache* 13:1-7).

Prophesy was as valuable to the first century Christian as any material resource; the prophets and teachers provided a service and were able to continue their work in the organizational structure of this community. The exchange was not between two commodities, but was among human beings.

While they did embrace fellowship and hospitality among the members of their community, the early Christians were not naive. *The Didache* produces rules of conduct

³⁴ “If the one who comes is a traveler, assist him as much as you can, but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, unless there is a necessity. If he wishes to settle with you and is a craftsman, let him work for his living. If he is not a craftsman, decide according to your own judgment who he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness. If he will not do this, he is one who makes a gain from Christ,” (*The Didache*, 12:2-4).

that protect the church from those who will take advantage of generosity. The Christians were commanded to give freely of materials, but to be more discerning when handling cash. The prophets received sustenance in exchange for knowledge, but never commodity. It was advised that “if anyone says in spirit, ‘Give me silver,’ or whatever else, do not listen to him,” (*The Didache* 12:1). Records indicate that the early Christian communities had problems with opportunistic deceivers (Swett 1998). The members, thus, were on guard against false prophets. It is also written that they should, “let every apostle who comes...be received...He will stay one day, and if necessary, a second day, but if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. Let the apostle when departing take nothing except bread until he arrives at his next lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet,” (*The Didache* 11:4). The early Christian teachers advised for a conscious awareness of the relationship between a self and material gain. The material exchanged determines the object of significance; if the prophet collects capital, he is delivering power through God so that he can survive, whereas if the prophet collects sustenance goods, he is surviving so that he can deliver power through God. The community both shared without question or judgment, and protected itself against the potential greed and manipulation inherent in the social interactions of the political world in which it existed.

The Movement to Restore Ecological Balance

The mobilization of Christianity through the instruction of the historical Jesus was a response to the political, social, and ecological imbalance perpetuated through the oppressive and expansionary characteristics of the Roman Empire. As the prior chapter

has elucidated, the ecological devastation suffered at the peak of the positive growth trajectory was clearly connected to the culture of conquest and consumption; consequently, the conquest and consumption maintained a highly stratified structure of social interaction. If Jesus commanded a mobilization against the political oppression and the social stratification, then he was also instructing a movement toward ecological restoration. While much less literature exists aligning the movement of early Christianity with ecological restoration than with political mobilization or social transformation perhaps due to an anthropocentric bias on behalf of the interpreter, an examination of primary Scripture references, in conjunction with available secondary interpretation, will reveal the additional motivation for human responsibility within and upon the Earth.

Renouncing domination in its many forms

Quite clearly, Christianity has already established itself as a mobilization force in response to the dominant forms of oppression and injustice among the human members of the Earth community. This “praxis of solidarity” with the oppressed can easily be extended to include all life forms (Edwards 1995, 144). Lohfink has expressed that the structures of patriarchal domination, which are particularly characteristic of Roman society, are contrary to the type of community about which Jesus instructed (Lohfink 1984, 115). Jesus offered “the basis for a prophetic critique of all forms of sexism, racism, economic exploitation and dominating relationships,” (Edwards 1995, 117). Patriarchal domination includes acts of violence toward human beings, non-human beings, and the Earth (Devall and Sessions 1985). Jesus instructed against any form of

domination, including domination over non-humans and the Earth. The intention of Jesus' teachings was to reconstruct the existing social reality which strongly embraced “the will to overpower and control” (Lohfink 1984, 124). To practice non-violence and to renounce domination inherently places emphasis away from the projection of the self or the needs of mankind, and upon the long-term needs of another.

Valuing the Earth and the non-human beings

Jesus' instruction emerged from a tradition that honored the Earth as an extension of God. Psalm 24:1 expresses the relationship between the Earth and God, and between the Earth and humanity. It reads: “The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” With this verse, humanity is positioned not superior to everything else that inhabits the Earth, but is completely equal upon it. The only entity given significant hierarchy is God. Similarly, Psalm 89:11 reads, “The heavens are yours, and yours also the Earth; you founded the world and all that is in it.” 'Yours' refers, of course, to God, not to humanity, and again places the human in a subordinate position beneath God, but equal to everything else that is upon the Earth. Furthermore, in both verses, the Earth is expressed as a creation of God, and is thus recognizable as an aspect of God. In revering the Earth, humanity experiences participation with an entity established from divinity.

Human beings are not the only inhabitants of the Earth that participate with the divinity of God. When Elijah was hiding in the Kerith Ravine, ravens fed him bread and meat upon the commandment from God (1 Kings 17:2). In his vision of the completion

of history at the destruction of Babylon, John the son of Zebedee saw “every creature in heaven and on Earth and under the Earth and on the sea, and all that is in them” singing praise to God and to the sacrificial Lamb of God (Rev. 5:13). Psalm 145:21 and Psalm 148:3 also reference “every creature” glorifying the power of God and “[praising] the name of the Lord”. At the time of Jesus' baptism, John the Baptists witnessed a dove descending as the spirit of God to testify to the presence of the Christ (John 1:32).

Finally, an amulet from the seventh century worn to heal and protect from fever invokes both the power of Jesus Christ and a white wolf. This amulet constructed and charmed for an unknown “Joseph,” includes the prayer spell “Jesus Christ heals the chill and the fever and every disease of the body of Joseph, who wears the amulet daily and intermittently. They are quick! Amen, Alleluia. Let the white wolf, the white wolf, the white wolf heal the shivering fever of Joseph. They are quick!” inscribed around the word ERICHTHONIE presented in a heart formation (Meyer and Smith 1994).³⁵

If non-human beings were created simply for the use-value of human beings, why would they be such active participants in fulfilling the will and the promise of God? Edwards remarks that “every creature, in its form, its function and its beauty, reflects the divine Wisdom. Every creature is the divine self-expression, a symbol and sacrament of God's trinitarian presence. Each creature is a work of art of the trinitarian God. Every species, each ecosystem, the Earth's biosphere and the universe itself are the self-expression of divine fecundity and delight,” (Edwards 1995, 117). A social structure that exploits non-humans and the Earth to advance the will of humanity defies the will of

³⁵ The white wolf has possible connections to both the Egyptian god Horus and the Greek god Apollo, while the word ERICHTHONIE may be in reference to the Greek hero Erichthonios.

God. It is only when the will of humanity is to advance the will of God that the human will may be exerted.

Participating with the natural cycle of the Earth

Humans receive virtues from the Earth. Not only did the ravens assist Elijah in his time of need, but also does “faithfulness spring from the Earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven,” (Psalm 85:10). The Earth teaches faithfulness so that humanity will learn to trust the will of God and not try to control nature to extract excessive foods or materials, but will maintain faith that the Earth will provide for them. Faithfulness instructs that the human is one smaller piece of a larger network of life.

Solomon notices that:

“Generations come and generations go, but the Earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes; ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again,” (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

Without faith, the human loses himself in the complexity of time and space; but in understanding the natural cycle of interconnectivity, wisdom to overcome the oppressive force of death is achieved.

This wisdom was communicated to humanity through Jesus who emerged from the same source as did the Earth and the non-human beings. John identifies that “all things” spawn from the light of Jesus (John 1:3). To understand the teachings of Jesus is to channel the light of ecological realization. This idea is expressed in other literatures as well (Edwards 1995, 78). Paul realizes that humans exist for God, that all things exist

because of God, and that all things exist through Jesus (1 Corinthians quoted in Edwards 1995, 78). Paul also expresses that in Jesus all things on Earth were created (Colossians quoted in Edwards 1005, 78). Again, Paul communicates that Jesus' instructions were for the gathering of all things in heaven and on Earth (Ephesians quoted in Edwards 1995, 78). Finally, Thomas records that Jesus said, “all came forth from me, all attained to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Pick up a stone, and you will find me there,” (The Gospel of Thomas, 75). Although Christianity has been chastised for its anthropocentric leanings, the early literatures reflect a philosophy that considers Jesus a redeemer of all things on Earth, not just humanity. Furthermore, the everything that emerged from the common source includes both human beings and non human beings; any biological distinction between the two is irrelevant, since all that exists expanded from a single entity. In Christian philosophy, that entity from which life (human life, nonhuman life, all life) expanded was Jesus, the human image of an invisible God. This God, which was the light that created life, became human to instruct the other humans about appropriate interaction with each other and with the Earth. The intention was to communicate wisdom to reveal the process towards self-realization, to then achieve biocentric equality so that all life forms can flourish.

The flourishing of all life forms is the will of God, materialized from the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is generally thought of as a space beyond the material world, but to the contrary, much evidence exists to suggest that it is on Earth. What has come to be known as The Secret Gospel of Mark can be interpreted in part to recommend that the human understand that the Kingdom of God is a rule of God, in opposition to the

rule of human (Smith 1982). This rule of God that the human does not own or control could be referring to the Earth, since the human will never completely overcome the forces of nature.

Furthermore, Thomas records that at one point the disciples were asking Jesus to explain when the kingdom would come. Jesus replied that it would not come as a result of a search but rather that “the kingdom of God is spread out on the Earth, but the people do not see it,” (The Gospel of Thomas, 112; Davies 1983, 68; Cameron 1982, 37). It is present to everyone, and is before everyone, but is yet invisible to their eyes. Perhaps it only appears invisible to those who, like the rich young man, refuse to accept the meaning of the teachings for material simplicity and ecological equity.

The kingdom of God, which was a contradiction to the kingdom of the Roman Empire, can also be expressed as ecological restoration. During worship the members of the early Christian community actively engaged in a vision of restoration. The process was an extension of the self following an inward retrieval of “pollutants” for “confession” (The Didache 14:1). During ceremony, they recited the prayer that “as this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains, and gathered together and became one, so may [the] congregation be gathered together from the ends of the Earth into [the] kingdom,” (The Didache 9:4). If all beings praise God, then the “congregation” to be “gathered” would include beings other than human beings. The vision of restoration was ecological in that it would overcome divisions among the humans, and would seek interconnectivity between the humans and the non humans.

The clearest evidence that the kingdom of God is in the material world can be derived from the literature of the prophets that expresses divine communication through the means of ecological phenomenon. When God is unhappy with the human interaction, ecological disaster strikes; when the interaction is realigned, nature flourishes. This tradition can be traced as far back as Isaiah and his vision of the collapse of Babylon. Isaiah records that “the Earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered” because “the Earth is defiled by its people, they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant,” (Isaiah 24:1). Human exploitation of the Earth will render it uninhabitable.

Similarly, Nolan points out that “John's prophetic message was a simple one. God was angry with the people and planned to punish them ... John pictured this destruction as a great forest fire before which the vipers flee, in which trees and chaff are burnt, and in which people will be engulfed in a baptism of fire ... The forest fire is an image of hell on earth,” (Nolan 1978, 15).³⁶ As does Isaiah, so does John also blame the ecological disaster on human arrogance and irresponsibility.

The warning of John the Baptist, who prepared the human beings for the instruction of Jesus, was most likely responding to the threat of ecological instability created under Roman rule. As expressed in the outline of the research results, the Roman Empire practiced behaviors of environmental exploitation and degradation. Paul, a Roman, notices that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation [has been] subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but

³⁶ Matthew 3:8; 3:10; 3:11.

by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage of decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God,” (Romans 8:18). Paul understands that when God is revealed, humanity will inherently practice an interaction of interconnectivity with the rest of creation, and the Earth will no longer be dominated and oppressed under the rule of human will. Paul communicates that, under Roman rule, the Earth suffers just as much as the humans.

According to recorded philosophy, the Earth will continue to suffer until the kingdom of God is fulfilled. John the son of Zebedee recalls from his vision that when Babylon falls one third of all the trees are burnt up, and that all the grass is burnt up (Rev. 8:7). This vision is very similar to the one John the Baptist shared prior to the baptism of Jesus. The other ecological disasters to become upon the Earth due to human activity prior to the fulfillment of the kingdom include nations in famine and disease, the roaring and tossing of the sea, elements destroyed by fire, and the Earth and everything growing on it laid bare (Luke 21:25; 2 Peter 3:10). However, the ecosystem will be restored because “the meek will inherit the Earth.” (Matthew 5:1).³⁷ When balance between the human, the non-human and the Earth is achieved, “the desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like a crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy ... Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs,” (Isaiah 35:1). Nature in all its original splendor will be rejuvenated, the garden re-inhabited.

³⁷ See Appendix B for entire account of the well-known and highly influential Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus was the connection between the humans and the Earth for the completion of ecological restoration. John expresses Jesus as the agent of interconnectivity between all forms of life. He writes that Jesus “is the one who came by water and blood ... He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement,” (1 John 5:6). Spirit, water, and blood are each in equal relationship with the other, and any form of life has these elements in common. It is through his arrival by means of each of the three elements equally that renders him the symbolic agent of interconnectivity. The relationship between the elements is the “primary reality” that must be realized for the completion of ecological restoration (Edwards 1995, 115). If a life form can be understood as a component of a larger pool of blood, water, and Spirit, then every life form contributes to the well-being of the whole.

The relationship between the sacred trinity of blood, water, and spirit is also referenced in the Coptic Gnostic gospel, *The Dialogue of the Savior*.³⁸ Judas asks of Jesus “Tell [us], Lord, before [the heaven and] the earth were, what was it that [existed]? The Lord said ‘It was darkness and water and a spirit that was upon a [water]. But I say to [you, as for what] you seek after [and] inquire about, [behold, it is] within you...’” (Cameron 1982, 42).³⁹ Before the human and the non-human beings, before the Earth and before the sky even, water and spirit moved within and through each other. All life emerged from this movement, and is now part of this movement, as it has been

³⁸ This text preserves some of the interchanges between Jesus, Matthew, Judas, and Mariam. It was originally written in Greek and Coptic. It is the last of five tractates that make up Codex III of the Coptic Gnostic Library. It was discovered in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, and was published in 1976.

³⁹ Square brackets in this quotation indicate a lacuna in the manuscript.

manifested; life cannot be divided and subdivided into categories and species when it at first was all water and spirit.

Since the relationship between water, spirit, and finally blood, is one of equality, the *koinonia*, or community or fellowship of the Holy Spirit,⁴⁰ unites in kinship not only Christian human beings, but also non Christian human beings, and non human beings (Edwards 1995, 119). As writer and theologian Jurgen Moltmann expressed “*the community of creation*, in which all created things exist with one another, for one another and in one another, is also *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*, (original italics)” (quoted in Edwards 1995, 119).⁴¹ The movement of the Spirit, like flow of blood and water, is not reserved for a hierarchy of human beings alone; all of creation is available for the democracy of the Spirit.

The availability of the Spirit to every life-form on Earth forces the Christian to reexamine the popular concept of salvation. Salvation has typically been reserved for human beings, and has rendered the mainstream Christian practice fairly individualistic and very anthropocentric. Scriptural evidence, however, suggests the contrary, that salvation is for every life form just as is the Spirit, the blood, and the water. Paul writes that “[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,” (Colossians 1:15). Edwards argues that “Colossians will not allow us to contain our theology of redemption within

⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 13:13.

⁴¹ See Johnson 1993 for further discussion about the fellowship of creation.

the narrower orbit of human sin and forgiveness. It must involve other creatures. The rest of creation cannot be seen merely as the stage on which the drama of human redemption is played out. The Colossians hymn insists that the whole universe is caught up in the Christ event,” (Edwards 1995, 82). If all things emerged from the light of Christ, and if humans are among those life forms that did emerge, and if salvation is for humans, then salvation would also be for the other life forms involved in the emergence of the light of Christ. If salvation is for all life forms, then humans form one universe with other non human beings; everything in the universe shares in the creative light of Christ.

Similar other hymns with complimentary themes were an important aspect of the first century Christian worship experience. One hymn, which fully embodies the expectation for a transformative worship space, invited the disciples to participate in a rite of interconnectivity. Jesus led this hymn, which survives in the *Acts of John* and commemorates a shared experience among the apostles shortly before the crucifixion. The song, heavily influenced with Johannine mysticism, was performed in a circle with the singers linking hands (Payne 1980). With each performance of the hymn, the singers are reminded of their interconnectivity with the universe, with the earth, and with each other:

“The Heavenly Spheres make music for us! The Holy Twelve join the dance! I have no dwelling, but I have mansions! I have no resting place, but I have the whole Earth. I have no temple, but I have the whole of Heaven. I would be saved, and I would save. I would be lost and I would lose. I would be pierced and I would pierce. I would be born and I would bear.”

The performers of this ritual song participated in the knowledge that their community extended beyond the immediately perceivable moment and immediately perceivable being.

Other teachings from The Didache suggest a responsibility of neutralization, as if the first century Christians understood that their role was to redistribute balance within an interaction of inequality. They were commanded to bless those who cursed them, to pray for their enemies, and to fast on behalf of those who persecuted them; they were promised that if they abode by this principle and loved those who hated them, they would have no enemies (*The Didache* 1:3). Their methods of resistance incorporated the spiritual practice of mindful action, and this action, in its renunciation of all forms of violence and domination can very easily be applied against structures of ecological devastation.

Acquiring material simplicity

The consumptive activities of the Romans accelerated the force of the pending ecological disaster (Chew 2007). It was for this reason that Jesus instructed the disciples to mobilize a movement that served something other than the pursuits of the self, expressed through economic activity and the accumulation of wealth. The Christian community was expected to participate in an oppositional relationship with wealth, where “the pursuit of wealth is diametrically opposed to the pursuit of God or the kingdom of God. Mammon and God are like two masters. If you love and serve the one, you must of

necessity reject the other. No compromise is possible,” (Nolan 1978, 50).⁴² A human being cannot both participate with the mechanisms of conquest and expansion, and honor the values of ecological restoration, when the ruin of the environment is directly related to the structure of domination. Jesus' instructions toward the love of God and away from the pursuit of wealth, expressed as the unity of all life-forms, sought to realign the trajectory of the existing human value system.

John the Baptist, in preparation for his prophecy to witness God as a dove, renounced all material possession to live in the wilderness. He wore only camel hair with a leather belt around his waist, and ate only locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6). Although a great many people retreated into the desert to see him when he began his prophecy with baptisms in the Jordan River, they were wary of his appearance; perhaps they had been expecting a king or an influential member of the aristocracy. Jesus asked the group about John, questioning, “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces,” (Luke 7:24). Jesus quickly established the difference between the power and authority of the world, and the power and authority of what it was that sent John the Baptist. From the very first moment of 'Christianity' (ie, the recognition of the historical Jesus as the one who would mobilize, transform, and restore the corrosive structure of the world) the denial of “indulgence” and “luxury” was established.

⁴² Matthew 6:24; Mark 4:19.

Many of Jesus' lessons to his disciples addressed the value of acquiring material simplicity. He instructed his disciples to “not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them,” (Matthew 6:25; Luke 12:22). Similarly to the birds of the air, the lilies of the field also are clothed and “they do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these,” (Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27). These lessons not only educate the listening human beings about the value of life beyond material possession, but also further illuminate the similarities and the interconnectivities between the human beings and the other non-human beings. God provides for every life form, yet the human beings are the only life forms that have built entire systems of domination and oppression to pursue material wealth. Jesus instructed to realign the pursuit of humanity with the pursuit of the other forms of life.

These lessons were difficult to fathom for the wealthy, for they had many possessions to redistribute among the community. For this reason, Jesus attempted to point out the difference between materiality and immateriality. He said, “do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where rust and moth destroy, where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourself treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also,” (Matthew 6:19; Luke 12:33). If the human being is more interested in accumulating material wealth, chances are he or she is gathering items that have been

acquired through massive social oppression and environmental destruction, yet it will not last. His or her energy has been wasted. But, if the human being focuses his or her energy upon generating love within his or her community, nothing is destroyed, nothing is oppressed, and it overcomes the material realities of moths and rust. For these reasons, when Jesus was approached by a rich man, he recommended, “go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me.” However, when the rich man heard this, “he was sad because he had great wealth” and was not prepared to give up his material possessions. Jesus then pointed out that it is very hard for “a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:18). The wealthy have much to give up, and if they do not understand the process of overcoming materiality, the change into communal living appears to be a loss instead of a gain. The rich have consistently benefited from the structures of domination, and it is much more difficult for them to abandon that privilege than it is for the oppressed to abandon their position.

The disciples continued to mobilize their communities around material simplicity following the crucifixion of Jesus. We have already discussed the sharing of possessions and the communal values within the first communities, but Paul further identifies the necessity for the Christians to overcome the influence of the values of expansion and conquest characteristic of the structure of the world in which they lived. He suggests that since “[the human beings] brought nothing into the world, and [the human beings] can take nothing out of it” all should be content with food and clothing. He warns that “people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and

harmful desires ... For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” (1 Timothy 6:7). “Evil” can be understood in this context to include both social and ecological destruction, since quite clearly the pursuit of wealth in the Roman Empire devastated both human communities and ecosystems.

The Book of James also points out the contradictions of accumulating wealth. The writer chastises the rich, foretelling misery to come upon them, expressing that “your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of God. You have lived in the Earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter,” (James 5:1). This warning could have been a prophetic remark foretelling the future collapse of the Roman Empire, when any wealth meant nothing because food was unavailable. At the time of collapse, even the rich were hungry.

Clearly, the instruction of Jesus for material simplicity was an aspect of his intention to restore ecological balance. Human beings only inhabit the Earth in imbalance when they consume beyond their most basic needs. For this reason, Jesus taught that first, the human should value qualities of life beyond material accumulation of wealth; and second, the human should not worry about his material conditions because the Earth will provide what he needs, in the same way that the Earth provides for the

birds and for the lilies. Jesus' teachings carried forth an extension of the Psalm discussed earlier which illuminated that faithfulness emerged from the Earth.

Conclusion

Christianity was a movement of political mobilization, social transformation, and ecological restoration in response to the system of domination of the Roman Empire. Jesus has been closely identified with Jewish revolutionaries, and his crucifixion resembles a political assassination. During his lifetime, though, the instructions he gave could restructure the human organization to end social oppression and environmental domination. The disciples carried forth this tradition, and the Christian communities in the first century embraced the movement toward an earth community in balance.

CHAPTER 3

The expansionary activities of the Roman Empire created widespread political, social, and ecological imbalance. Warfare was vital to the economy of the Roman Empire, as it secured resources such as land and slaves for the reproduction of the Empire. The conquered land was used to grow produce for the citizens of Rome, and the slaves were used for labor. Social stratification was a feature of the Empire. The imperial government and the local city Councils consisted of members of the wealthy aristocracy interested in securing and maintaining their own consolidated power. As a result, the gap between the classes widened until most of the wealth were in the hands of a small minority of elite. These elite lifestyles practiced unsustainable consumptive activities leading to the ecosystem being degraded. This had severe impact on the reproduction needs of the Roman Empire. The result was widespread crisis. When imperial taxation was greater than the ability of the peasants to pay, they in turn began to abandon their farm plots. This led to widespread food shortages and unrest in the city of Rome. These structural economic and ecological crises that the Roman Empire experienced during the first three centuries AD provided the conditions whereby the instruction of Jesus offered alternative choices to which the citizens of the Empire could subscribe.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, the movement of Christianity sought to restore the political, social, and ecological interaction of the human upon the Earth. Through the Christian principles of organization, the existing system of governance would be

deconstructed and sovereignty would be returned to the people. Furthermore, scriptural text from Mark and Luke describe how Jesus, in his lifetime, repeatedly challenged the same taxation, thus undermining the operations of accelerated economic activity within the Roman Empire.

In the Roman Empire, political power was consolidated in the hands of the elite minority. Other classes of people were inconsequential and were heavily over-taxed. The Christian principles of organization fostered the view that the underrepresented people can extend their control over their own resources and leadership. According to Christian principles, food distribution would be localized and consumption would be equalized. No human was justified in honoring him or herself and his or her needs over another human or non-human life form. Christian organization encourages communal organization through the linking of networks of communities via consensus in contrast to the existing social interaction of oppression and extreme stratification as propounded by the Roman Empire.

The Christian principles of organization honor the value of the other non-humans. The egalitarianism that defines the social interaction within a Christian community extends to welcome non-human interaction. A 'praxis of solidarity' unites Christianity with other movements that challenge any structure of domination, and the most fundamental instruction within the Christian principle is to avoid participation with any structure that necessitates violence for its perpetuation.

Although its principles do teach non-violence and equality toward all forms of life, Christianity has evolved into an anthropocentric philosophy. However, the examination of both the Old and the New Testament honor the Earth and the other non-human life as the same expression of creation as the human being. To ignore the subtle yet insistent lessons that the human is not superior to the Earth and its non-human life once again emphasizes the human tendency toward arrogance. Psalms clearly elucidates the order of divine hierarchy, and the human is on the same cosmic plane as the Earth and its creation. Furthermore, several stories even recall a human depending on another non-human for survival. These tales of symbiosis can be found in 1 Kings, Revelation, and the Gospel of John. The anthropocentric interpretation popular among the contemporary Christian organization is clearly a misguided and outdated concept.

If the Christian organization is to return to its basic eschatology, it must acknowledge the patterns revealed in its prophetic literature of cycles of anthropocentrism and concurrent ecological crisis. Isaiah foretold the destructive presence of Rome, while Paul and John of Zebedee write of another time to come when the Earth would be ravaged of its bounty, when the waters would run dry, and when the sun would burn and scar the land, leaving the human beings to starve in famine or die fighting for political and social resources. For Isaiah, Paul, and John, the stability of the ecosystem could not be separated from the stability of the human system.

The principles of Christianity infer a life of material simplicity within a community of humans and non-humans alike. Psalms and Colossians describe the Earth as an extension of God. Kings, Psalms, John, Colossians, and Revelation all suggest that

non-humans participate with divinity and as such, share in the gift of salvation. Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and John illuminate how the human being participates with the natural cycle of the Earth, and in addition, the apocalyptic texts such as Isaiah, Romans, and Revelation also connect human activity with ecological disaster. Although the ecological aspect of the Christian principles outlined by Jesus have not been as clearly defined through the centuries as the political and social aspects, the relationship between Christian practice and ecological balance is unavoidable. To restore the Earth after an expansionary interaction such as that of the Roman Empire, the human beings must practice an interaction of peaceful simplicity with all forms of life.

Both practical and theoretical applications can extend from this research. For example, the current Western worldview is an evolution of the Judeo-Christian and medieval Christian worldview (Devall and Sessions, 45; Drengson 2006, 3). In view of the above, the Christian community, then, should actively redirect its efforts in the social evolution of the community along with spiritual transformation, for “it is no longer sufficient for theologians simply to take it for granted that the basic structure and commitments of traditional Christian faith are -in all of their main lines- right and proper; and to proceed, then, to expound and reinterpret them in whatever ways seem intelligent and persuasive,” (Kaufman 2000, 1). The members of the Church can easily practice ecocentrism, communalism, and material simplicity, and the two greatest commandments from God. Currently, though, the religion is not understood in these such terms. Because it has been alienated from the historical and social context from which it arose, most practitioners of Christianity, in their failure to strive for ecocentrism, communalism, and

material simplicity over self-salvation, have become anthropocentric, individualistic, and consumerist. When anyone, Christian or not, can interpret the human interaction with the non-human and the Earth through an ecocentric, communal, and materially simplistic perspective, then he or she will understand the interconnectivity of the experience of all life. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, suggests that there are two types of people. Some “see the problems in isolated ways compatible with mild reform,” while others “see the problems holistically as requiring a deep change in our forms of life,” (Drengson 1995; 75). The movement toward holistic understanding will further assist the fundamental shift in worldview perspective. The conclusion of this thesis strives to reunite the source of knowledge with the knowledge itself so that ecological meaning can be understood.

This proposal to realign Christian practice will hopefully help to redefine Western society's conception of progress. “The ultimate value judgment upon which technological society rests- progress conceived as the further development and expansion of the artificial environment necessarily at the expense of the natural world- must be looked upon from the ecological perspective as unequivocal regress,” (Devall and Sessions 1985, 48). Progress should involve inward development for outward spiritual expression, as opposed to material expansion for spiritual repression. This transformation will further allow other beings to realize their fullest potential as it “will be more appropriate to the unity and the interrelatedness of the Earth, with its limitations and its delicately balanced ecosystem. Such an orientation will stimulate more fulfilling personal development as well,” (Drengson 1995; 79). When the humans are seeking

inward balance instead of accumulation of material wealth, the life they experience is deeper and more profound. Fullest potential is realized with the education attained through the connection with other life.

We are now at a stage whereby the Earth and its human and non-human inhabitants are again reaching a critical point of ecological crisis (Naess 1989; Devall and Sessions 1985; Edwards 1995; Chew 2007). The expansionary and imperial structure of the Western world-system which perpetuates anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism is accelerating the impact of this pending crisis (Devall and Sessions 1984; Naess 1989; Edwards 1995; Drengson 2006; Chew 2007). The inevitable point of widespread ecological decline will usher in another period of shortage and famine similar to what occurred at the collapse of the Roman Empire (Chew 2007). The organizational decisions that are orchestrated within the human communities over the next several years will determine the overall health and well-being of the Earth and all of its inhabitants.

If we follow the general interpretation of Jesus' instruction, then a response needs to be made to challenge the current structures of domination and oppression (Cullman 1970; Nolan 1978; Cadoux 1982; Echeagaray 1984; Lohfink 1984).

The Roman Empire perpetuated its existence through the mechanisms of political conquest, social stratification, and ecological destruction. The current structures of Western world-system, like the Roman Empire, also employ mechanisms of political conquest, social stratification, and ecological destruction to reproduce its existence (Chew 2007; Murphy 2007). In light of this, the contemporary Christians should challenge this destructive force, in accordance with the intention and instruction of Jesus.

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APPENDIX A

A Chronological Table of First Century Christian/Roman Interactions

- 4BC** The death of Herod the Great
The inheritance of Judaea and Samaria to Herod Archelaus
- AD 6** Judas of Galilee organizes the Zealot rebellion movement
- 8** The Romans depose Herod Archelaus
Rome conquers Judaea and Samaria
- 26** Jesus baptized
- 28** Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount
- 29** Jesus crucified
- 40** The conversion of the Centurion Cornelius
- 41** James the Son of Zebedee martyred
- 54** Nero becomes Emperor of Rome
- 62** *The Epistle of James* begins circulation
- 63** Rome colonizes Palestine
- 64** The Christians blamed for the fire at Rome
Peter and Paul martyred in Rome
- 64-70** *The Gospel of Mark*
1 and 2 Timothy and Titus
The Epistle to the Hebrews
The Epistle of Peter all begin circulation
- 66** The outbreak of Jewish war against the Romans
The Zealots overthrow the Roman occupation
- 67** Christians in Jerusalem escape to Pella
The Romans burn the Temple in Jerusalem

- 70** The Roman army conquers Jerusalem
- 70-80** *The Gospel of Matthew*
The Gospel of Luke
The Acts of Luke all begin circulation
- 73** Approximately one thousand Zealots commit suicide at the mountain fortress Masada to resist submission to Roman army
- 75** *The Epistle of Barnabas* begins circulation
- 80-90** *The Didache* begins circulation
- 93** *The Apocryphon of John* begins circulation
- 94** *The Epistle of Clemens* begins circulation
- 100** *The Vision of Isaiah* begins circulation
- 100-110** *The Gospel of John* begins circulation

APPENDIX B

The Sermon on the Mount⁴³

Matthew 5:1-14

When Jesus saw the crowds following him, he went to the side of a mountain and sat. His disciples gathered around him, so he began to teach. He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you. You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds.”

⁴³ Also called The Beatitudes.