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# Human Ecology, Environmental Ecology, and a *Ressourcement* Theology

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*Caritas in veritate* in the Light  
of Philip Sherrard's Theandric Anthropology

A DEVELOPING THEOLOGICAL MOTIF in the social magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI is the explicit recognition of the inextricable link between the demands of charity and care for the physical environment. In *Caritas in veritate*, for instance, the Holy Father states that not only does respect for “human ecology” within society benefit “environmental ecology,”<sup>1</sup> but that the former is the decisive factor in establishing a proper human relationship with physical nature. Understood in the full context of the Church’s social doctrine, which ultimately elucidates the societal implications of the gift of charity, this would mean that it is only through the inculcation of the supernatural virtues in the life of the Church, which radiate outwardly into the social sphere, that a truly “deep” ecology can be nurtured. The gift of charity carries with it not only social but cosmic significance.

The Holy Father effects a transformation of most modern thought as it pertains to the relationship of creation to history by linking together the two ecologies of the created order in the

perspective of charity. This calls to mind the patristic transformation of Greco-Roman microcosmism in the first millennium of the Church.<sup>2</sup> Benedict follows in the tradition of the patristic theologians in establishing the essential connection between the vocation and destiny of man and the sanctification of the physical universe. There were several twentieth-century *ressourcement* theologians who brought the patristic doctrine of man as microcosm and workshop of creation to the forefront again, precisely in order to recover the inextricable link between *anthropos* and *cosmos* in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

One such theologian, who was also among the first twentieth-century intellectuals to sound the alarm of the environmental crisis, was the Greek Orthodox theologian, poet, and eminent English translator of many great spiritual and poetic creations of modern and pre-modern Greek literature, Philip Sherrard (1922–95). Sherrard sought to recover a truly spiritual and metaphysical cosmology in the line of the great patristic tradition of Christian thought that elucidates the connection of (to use Benedict's language) "human ecology" to "environmental ecology." An exposition of Sherrard's work on this topic can shed a great deal of light on Benedict's *Caritas in veritate*, especially if Sherrard's Eastern Christian polemic is, from the outset, scrutinized and tempered. My purpose in the present article is to use Sherrard's patristic "return to the sources," especially as found in his book *Human Image: World Image*, as a guide to uncover some of the wider implications of the Holy Father's suggestions. I shall focus in the first section on Sherrard's Christological and trinitarian participationist metaphysics or "theandric anthropology." In the second, I shall briefly expound his Christian Platonist epistemology. His evaluation of the human crisis at the root of the ecological crisis has both a metaphysical and an epistemological dimension. The two are necessarily linked.

## I

*Caritas in veritate* is founded on an explicitly Christological and trinitarian perspective that sees the destiny of man and the world in the light of the innate connection of all creation to the supernatural. It remains a perpetual task for theologians to articulate this connection fully. Sherrard's participationist metaphysics or Christian theandric anthropology exemplifies the sort of work that theologians are called to accomplish in this regard. Nevertheless, it is helpful, in expounding his theology, to abstract from his harshly expressed Eastern Christian polemic against the Western Church.<sup>4</sup> Sherrard rightly saw it as necessary, in order to combat modern naturalism, to recover the metaphysical and anthropological implications of the Chalcedonian tradition. Yet he could see the mainstream, premodern Western tradition as little more than an obstacle standing in the way of such a recovery. He refused to recognize the mystical depths of the Western tradition, except in more marginal figures like Eckhart and Eriugena, and his analysis of the premodern West is flawed as a result.<sup>5</sup> Even so, his theology as a whole is unique in connecting the recovery of Chalcedonian theandricism to the restitution of human ecology and environmental ecology. Moreover, few theologians in the modern age have been as bold as he to show the stark contrast between a Christian theandric view of man and a purely materialistic anthropology. We are now living in an age roiled by a resurgent naturalism, and his work has, as a result, taken on an increasing relevance. His tendentious reading of the premodern West need not cancel the value of his analysis because a Western theologian by drawing upon the resources of his own tradition properly understood can concur with Sherrard's metaphysical and epistemological criticism of modern man's debased self-image.

Sherrard's theological work can be situated as both a neo-patristic *ressourcement* theology and as a type of unremitting antisecularism inspired in great part by the French metaphysician and convert from Catholicism to Islamic Sufism, René Guénon (1886–1951).<sup>6</sup>

Guénon was one of the most radical and influential critics of modern scientism in the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> He initiated a movement of thought whose goal was to restore what he took to be the perennial sacred cosmology of ancient religious humanity. Sherrard, though rejecting Guénon's preference for non-Christian Eastern modes of thought, wrote of Guénon's importance as a metaphysician in the strongest terms:

If during the last century or so there has been even some slight revival of awareness in the western world of what is meant by metaphysics and metaphysical tradition, the credit for it must go above all to Guénon. At a time when the confusion into which modern western thought had fallen was such that it threatened to obliterate the few remaining traces of genuine spiritual knowledge from the minds and hearts of his contemporaries, Guénon, virtually single-handed, took it upon himself to reaffirm the values and principles which, he recognized, constitute the only sound basis for the living of a human life with dignity and purpose or for the formation of a civilization worthy of the name.<sup>8</sup>

The essay by Sherrard from which this quotation is taken is, in fact, a stirring defense of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity against Guénon's argument for the logical superiority of a Vedantic, non-dualist understanding of the Absolute. Nevertheless, the Guénonian influence on Sherrard is clear, particularly in regard to Sherrard's recovery of sacred cosmology.

Associates and followers of Guénon issued some of the earliest and most enduring analyses and refutations of the cultural and social forces that had brought modern industrial civilization to the point of ecological crisis by the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> These Guénonian analyses differ greatly from most approaches to environmental ecology so prevalent among theologians and others in our own day. Whereas today's theological ecologists place a focus primarily on developing an environmental ethics that is hardly

critical of scientism, the Guénonian school sought to recapture a religious vision of nature fully adherent to the metaphysical traditions of the world's religions, and as a result they were starkly critical of modern scientific cosmology.<sup>10</sup> Sherrard's goal is also to restore religious cosmology to a place of prominence, although he is not, like so many followers and associates of Guénon, simply a proponent of a perennialist religious philosophy. The religious vision of nature that Sherrard seeks to recover is specifically that of the tradition of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in Eastern Christian theology, and Sherrard's diagnosis of the modern situation, perhaps more than any other Guénonian analysis, stresses that the ecological crisis is rooted in a distorted anthropology. Truly, for Sherrard, "human ecology" has to be healed if "environmental ecology" is to have a foundation, for, as he says, "the ecological crisis . . . is primarily a crisis about man and not about his environment."<sup>11</sup>

Sherrard's work helps us to see at a very deep level all of the relationships—moral and metaphysical—that the Holy Father has brought into consideration with his suggestions in *Caritas in veritate*. His work is sharp and prophetic in this regard. He does not go in for half measures. Sherrard is, like Guénon, a religious radical in the best sense, getting at the religious roots of the dilemma of modern man. His writings have the power to shake us from a self-delusional complacency. In many ways, his bold, Eastern-inspired Christian voice is just what the Western, postconciliar Church needs to hear, as so many of her children are unduly submissive before the presumed authority of modern science.

It is important to grasp that modern culture is in fact rooted in religions and theological precommitments, and Sherrard's work is valuable in focusing our attention on this fact. He is thus able to show us that the ecological crisis goes far beyond the problem of global warming, or the depletion of the ozone layer, or beyond any issue or concern that could be addressed by purely political or economic legislation. Current debates about whether there is such a thing as anthropogenic global warming deal only with tangential

aspects of the ecological crisis. For Sherrard, the ecological crisis is not simply the issue of a consumer culture that refuses to use biodegradable goods and products or that takes little regard for how economic expansion affects the physical environment of modern living. The existence of mountainous landfills and chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere are but symptoms of a much deeper disease. The ecological crisis has its foundation, rather, in the desecration of sacral beauty within human culture and the environmental injustices that have become so much a concern for people in our own day ultimately flow from this desecration.<sup>12</sup>

Sherrard sees the absence of a transcendent religious presence at the center of modern life as the ultimate source of the environmental crisis. He argues that if man is to “save the environment,” he requires first of all an explicit and central cultural recognition of the transcendent source and destiny of his being. This is to say that man needs to order his life once again by the insights of sacred wisdom. Ritual, doctrinal, and religious recovery are essential to heal his relationship with nature. The objective laws of sacred liturgical and artistic symbolism have to be protected, nurtured, and given a place of prominence in the daily life of the city.<sup>13</sup> Religious contemplation has to be valued as the most genuine source of a deep science of the cosmos. Nonsacral lines of interpretation of cosmic being have to be subjected to severe criticism, for they deal with only the exterior aspects of things and so do not convey a true knowledge of the cosmos. Man’s essential link with the divine has to be expressed in culture as the guide for everything that he does, if he is to recover from the manifest anthropological and cosmological injustices that have marred modern life.<sup>14</sup>

This call to a recovery of the religious dimension of our being, our deepest self, is the practical outcome of Sherrard’s prescience that we can only have a truly respectful image of the world, and therefore a fully effective environmental ecology, if we recapture the sense of ourselves as God-informed beings.<sup>15</sup> Only a fully theological self-image can give rise to a world-image that inspires eco-

logical justice. We are from God and are not merely “two-legged animals,” and our relationship to the world depends upon whether we realize this. Sherrard argues that full acknowledgement of the divine origin of our nature requires a thoroughgoing, unstinting critique of secular humanist anthropologies that presume to be able to elucidate the nature of man on the basis of the findings of modern science alone:

In the great creative [religious] cultures of the world, human beings do not regard themselves as two-legged animals, descended from the apes, whose needs and satisfactions can be achieved through pursuing social, political, and economic self-interest in the material world and as though their life was confined to a material space-time dimension. On the contrary, they think of themselves first and foremost as descended from the gods, or from God, and as heirs to eternity, with a destiny that goes far beyond politics, society and economics, or anything that can be fulfilled in terms of the material world or by satisfying their mortal and physical desires and needs. They think of themselves as sacred beings, even as semi-divine beings, not in their own right, but because they are created in the divine image, in the image of God, of a transcendent more-than-human form of consciousness. They come from a divine source, and the divine world is their birthright, their true home.<sup>16</sup>

One often encounters theologians nowadays who talk about recapturing a sacramental image of the cosmos. From many theologians who have not assessed as deeply as Sherrard the foundations of modern science such talk can sound like a romantic dream, as if we can just choose to “reenchant” nature on a whim. Sherrard’s analysis is deeper than typical arguments for the reenchantment of nature in that he realizes that the recovery of a sacramental vision of the universe requires a recovery of the tradition of the Christian sacred in its fullest manifestation. Contrary to the standard talk of contem-

porary theologians he argues that modern science is so essentially desacralizing in its fundamental motivation that it is difficult if not impossible to reconcile it with a sacramental vision of faith. There is a fine line, he argues, between modern science and pure scientism, the former having attained to a position of cultural dominance precisely because the latter has engulfed the modern Western mind. The recovery of a sacramental understanding of nature cannot be, then, merely a project of reenchantment. We cannot simply superimpose our dreams for what we think the world could or should be onto a physical foundation that we think in reality comprises purely mechanical parts or mathematically reducible quanta of mass and energy.

The recovery of a sacramental world-image requires a sense of nature that has nothing in common with the reductionist visions of Bacon or Hobbes or Descartes or with any of their oftentimes unwitting postmodernist heirs. In recognizing this, we would be, with Sherrard, a far cry indeed from Sallie McFague's "eco-feminism" or Matthew Fox's concept of the cosmic Christ.<sup>17</sup> Both McFague and Fox give unquestioning allegiance to the modern scientific worldview. In contrast to these representative contemporary theologians, Sherrard recognizes that in order to understand the world sacramentally we must see its material "foundation" in integration with higher ontological planes. Indeed, it is these higher ontological planes, and not matter in and of itself, that are the foundational realities of cosmic being.

Sherrard realizes that a truly religious and therefore humane worldview would sharply contrast with modern, horizontalizing concepts of the world. Unlike McFague and Fox, he understands that the recovery of a truly sacramental cosmology requires that we be instilled with an awakened sense of the constitutive relationship of all things to their eternal, transcendent source. He realizes that it is precisely the sense of their relationship to their transcendent Creator that inspires religious people—and Christians most of all—to see the world in a sacramental way. Religious people do



not "look upon what we call the outer world, the world of nature, as a mere chance association of atoms or whatever, or as something impersonal, soulless, inanimate, which they are entitled to manipulate, master, exploit and greedily to tamper and mess about with in order to gratify their greeds and their power lusts. They look upon nature, too, as a divine creation, as full of a hidden wisdom as they themselves are, as full of a personal, sensitive soul-life or psychic life as they themselves are."<sup>18</sup>

Many theologians today are deeply concerned with the problem of environmental ecology, but they tend to let political and economic concerns dominate their thinking. Sherrard's work is a fully theological rejoinder to any form of political or economic reductionism. His suggestions for sacramental recovery, if followed on a wide scale, would spell the end of the technological imperative that propels modern civilization with its concomitant conception of man as a purely political or economic creature. With this said, Sherrard does not recommend "back to nature movements." He is a proponent of high religious civilization, though not imperialist and colonialist, and there is as a result a strong sense in his writings of what the postconciliar popes refer to as "integral human development." He is at pains to teach us, however, that any presumed human development that is not nourished by sacred wisdom carried in the context of sacramental tradition is ultimately dehumanizing.

Obviously, Sherrard's analysis of the human image that motivates modern scientific cosmology is uncompromisingly critical. Many readers of Sherrard have found him to be too one-sided in his assessment of modern science, but perhaps, as I have already suggested, it is precisely his sort of criticism that needs to have a greater hearing in our own day, when an increasing cultural prestige is accorded to sociobiologists and transhumanists and eugenicists of varying degrees of self-awareness. It is no accident that the modern world, when it has not been directly ensconced in terror and bloodshed, has been always on the precipice of tyranny and holocaust,

and Sherrard's analysis implies the clearly logical path that leads from the apotheosis of science and technology to the mass gallows, the gas chambers, the death camps, the abortion mills—and the destruction of the physical environment.

He forces us to ask ourselves how a “two-legged animal” could have an eternal moral value. If man is merely an accident or epiphenomenon of physical processes, how can we secure his dignity or his rights except on the basis of the shifting will of an increasingly vulgarized mass consciousness? And if man cannot see his own self in terms of the enduring dignity of his spiritual essence, how can he see anything else in that way? It is, again, no accident that he would turn his technology toward nature in the manner of brutal exploitation. It is no accident that humans who have come to see themselves as no more than “two-legged animals” would “deliberately blast out [nature's] guts through testing their atom and nuclear bombs, savage its skies with the din and stench of aeroplanes and space-craft, poison its rivers, its lakes, its seas, its underground waters through spilling chemicals into them or through the leaching of toxic wastes, or rape it in any of the thousands of ways in which we are now raping it.”<sup>19</sup>

All of what I have expounded thus far implies that Sherrard is a forceful exponent for the recovery of the Christian Platonist tradition of theology. His work is indeed thoroughly suffused with the metaphysical wisdom of this tradition in both its ancient and modern guises. This gives his analysis a great force of philosophical depth that is entirely lacking in the superficial indictments of the monotheistic religions, and of Christianity most of all, issued by the likes of Arnold Toynbee and Lynn White.<sup>20</sup> For these thinkers, the ecological catastrophe has its roots in the inspiration of classical Christian theology, which presumably sees man as a mere dominator of the natural world. It is not without pertinence to note, then, that the ecological crisis is, after all, a distinctly modern crisis. The age of its creeping advent in the modern West corresponds precisely to the age of the advent of a cultural shift from the metaphysical per-

spective of classical Christian theism, with its fully participationist doctrine of creation, to the scientific dualism first foreshadowed in late medieval nominalism.

Sherrard is surely truer to history than Toynbee or White in seeing that the modern world has gone down its brutalizing path because it no longer understands finite being in terms of the Christian doctrine of creation.<sup>21</sup> How, after all, can we know or respect either ourselves or the world we live in if we ignore the very ground of our being? Desacralized man fancies himself completely autonomous, self-sufficient, and able to understand the cosmos solely by assessing its material and physical dimensions. Has not Sherrard taken precisely the correct tone in responding to this modern pretension with mocking derision, naming it for what it is—"imbecilic"?<sup>22</sup> Some contemporary philosophers of an analytic persuasion consider it derisory to label one of their peers a Platonist.<sup>23</sup> But should a theologian be constrained, for fear of incurring such a superficial rebuke, from asking what must be for him the necessary question of how it is possible to know the plenary reality of anything without seeing it in the light of its share in God's eternal being?

The Chalcedonian tradition of Christian orthodoxy has taught us that it is indeed impossible to know any finite reality if we detach it in our speculative endeavors entirely from its eternal ground.<sup>24</sup> God's revelation in Christ has a meaning that encompasses all of reality. No finite being, as many Church Fathers and Scholastic theologians understood, can be truly itself unless it is fully interpenetrated by its *logos*, or the idea that God has of it within himself, in his own eternal Logos, from all eternity.<sup>25</sup> We cannot know anything in full without knowing its *logos*. We cannot know any *logos* in full without knowing the Logos. The ideal and the real must come to correspond in any finite being if it is to shine forth in the full splendor of its truth. This implies the need, if we are to develop a fully coherent science, or to understand the beings of nature as they truly are, to be able to make reliable assessments of the relationships between matter and form, symbol and referent, inner and outer, and essence

and manifestation. Modern science, in and of itself, does not give us the means for elucidating these relationships.

It was precisely Guénon's intention to recover the ancient religious participationist cosmologies so that we might have the wisdom once again to understand the world in its exemplary relationships.<sup>26</sup> Sherrard has obviously learned from Guénon in this regard. Thus, like Guénon, he takes full account of the interplay between the inner and outer dimensions of finite beings. Sherrard, like Guénon, realizes that one does not reach to the truth of a being by focusing only on its outer appearance in the manner of modern empirical investigation.<sup>27</sup> One must, he realizes with Guénon, know its inner reality, even as this is made known through its appearance, and this will elucidate the meaning of its manifestation as well.<sup>28</sup> No being can be understood, then, without seeing it in connection with its archetypal meaning. Both Sherrard and Guénon understand that it is necessary to encourage a theology of symbol and manifestation or a truly sacramental ontology if we are to restore *scientia* to its ancient scope and therefore dignity.

On the other hand, unlike Guénon, Sherrard does not stop with a generically monotheistic doctrine of participation. His thinking is, again, fully Chalcedonian. He understands the participation of all things in God in a Christological and trinitarian manner, and he focuses on the consummation of worldly being in the human person deified in Christ.<sup>29</sup> As for the great patristic and Scholastic theologians, so for Sherrard it is specifically Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Archetypal Man and thus the Archetype of all archetypes, who is the beginning and end of all finite beings.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Sherrard develops this ancient Christian tradition by using the language of the nineteenth-century Russian theologian and sophiologist Vladimir Soloviev. Like Soloviev, he speaks of the "divine-humanity" of Christ and of His "God-manhood."<sup>31</sup> These expressions serve to highlight the reality of Christ as the exemplary man, as the eternal fullness of humanity, "the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15), who perfects the human being by adopting him

into his eternal filiation or sonship. Christ is the eternal model of the human being who, in his hypostatic union, shows forth and actualizes everything that man has it within himself to become.

This manner of understanding Christ's relationship with humanity stresses that there is reciprocity in God's communion with man. On the one hand, it places an emphasis on recognizing that if we are to be fully ourselves God must be the determinative element of our being, the innermost, active center of our existence. On the other hand, it teaches that there is a fulfilling potentiality in human nature that brings God to completion in the hypostatic union.<sup>32</sup> This sounds very Hegelian, but it would be truer to Sherrard's (and Soloviev's) fully traditional intention to place this idea in line with Hans Urs von Balthasar's understanding of the trinitarian *perichoresis* in relation to creation than in the trajectory of a purely Hegelian mode of thought.<sup>33</sup> While lamenting the modern Western ecclesiastical theologian's undue fear of any sort of theological expression that can be even remotely associated with pantheism, Sherrard nevertheless fully recognizes the transcendence of God to finite being.<sup>34</sup>

Sherrard's argument in this respect may be taken as an attempt to provide a corrective to certain types of theology that fail to grasp the power of the grace of union by which God wills to establish communion with his creature. Sherrard in no way denies the eternal distinction of the natures in Christ.<sup>35</sup> He is a disciple of St. Maximus the Confessor and not a monothelite or monoenergist, however confusing his manner of expression may seem to be at first glance.<sup>36</sup> Without the "otherness" of the natures in Christ, he argues, there could be no communion of interpenetration between them. There could be no ecstatic self-completion. Christ's divinity radiates through his humanity, but this requires that he be both fully and "eternally human" (another expression that Sherrard derives ultimately from the Solovievian tradition) and fully and eternally divine. Christ fills his humanity with his Godhead, unlocking its inner potentialities from without and from within. On the other hand, his humanity gives his divinity the fullest mode of self-manifestation.

There is both perfect otherness and perfect union in Christ's hypostatic subjectivity. God shows himself for who he is through the human nature that he assumes in the hypostatic union. But he could not do so if man, the highest exemplar of created alterity, refused to be the instrument for his manifestation.<sup>37</sup> In stressing the foregoing points, Sherrard's work thus takes on a profoundly Marian as well as Christological dimension, as Mary is the archetypal created personal "other" in relationship to Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

Christ's intimate union with man in the hypostatic union in no way diminishes the specific activity of either his divine or human nature, and this is what is meant by speaking in terms of theandric anthropology in describing Sherrard's theology. Though they exist in a relationship of interpenetration and *perichoresis*, the divine and human natures in Christ are nevertheless joined together without confusion or change. They work together in Christ as a full unity through the power of his divine subjectivity, each according to its own mode, but in a perfect, cooperative, theandric synergy.<sup>39</sup> Christ's theandric activity is the model for all human perfection. Through our own personal divinization in Christ, we imitate, by an interpenetrating participation or filiation in him, the unified activity of the unconfused natures in his personal unity. We do not lose our individual identity in Christ. Our personal identity, just as human nature as such, is perfected by our share in the trinitarian life and by Christ's dwelling within us in his Spirit as the fullness of our being.<sup>40</sup>

Sherrard expounds the God-world relationship in terms of this just-described Chalcedonian theandricism in order to counter the modern idea that man and creation are self-sufficient and autonomous realities, with no final destiny transcending spatiotemporal immanence. Contemporary theologians could hardly be insistent enough to follow him on this point. If reality is collapsed, as it is by the scientism that dominates contemporary society, to the plane of contingent, horizontal movement in space and time, then it is no surprise that moral relativism should emerge in our day with such persistence. It is no surprise that we should, as a result, think that

physical nature is just a field for exploitation by our unanchored, egocentric volition. Martin Heidegger was famously critical of modernity's technological ontology, but he was captured by its non-teleological way of understanding the world, and his criticism of technological ontology thus tends to fall as flat as that ontology itself.<sup>41</sup> Sherrard, by contrast, moves our thinking in a vertical direction, seeing that all reality is grounded in the eternal, non-contingent, enduring reality of God's Eternal Word.

The point needs to be highlighted, in the face of a certain extrinsicism that still persists in Catholic theology, that to see the world in these participationist terms is in no way a retreat to a merely philosophical Platonism. The incarnational centering of Christian doctrine links the eternal with the finite in a profound unity that surpasses the concepts of all purely philosophical metaphysics. Sherrard's theology makes this Christian distinction clear. But even the best Catholic theologians of the twentieth century realized that modern Western theology, having lost a sense of the universal scope of the profound unity of the eternal and the finite in Christ, should turn more in the direction of the traditional patristic emphasis on the participation or filiation of all things in the Eternal Word.<sup>42</sup> Thus, one could rightly interpret Sherrard's work as aligned with the Catholic Church's own recent and internally corrective renewal of its theological schools. Nevertheless, Sherrard could use a Western or Augustinian precision, for he does, it seems, display a tendency to collapse the order of redemption into the order of creation.

By issuing this caveat, I mean to say that Sherrard downplays the unique importance of Christ's personal mission of redemption in salvation history in order to emphasize Christ the Eternal Word and Creator who is always present in all things. Sherrard does effectively recapture the doctrine of Maximus the Confessor and others in the tradition according to which the Incarnation of Christ is a perpetual reality that is not limited to his historical Incarnation alone.<sup>43</sup> With the Confessor he can say that Christ "wills always to perform the miracle of His Incarnation in all things."<sup>44</sup> This particular Chris-

tological emphasis does help us to see that there is nothing in our existence that is absolutely untouched by Christ's creative presence. It is important nevertheless to balance the emphasis on Christ the Pantocrator with an emphasis on Christ the Eternal Word fully and uniquely present in salvation history, whose Crucifixion is the only true path to personal and cosmic recreation.<sup>45</sup> As Hans Urs von Balthasar was at pains to insist—even as he himself recovered in a most sympathetic way the Christological, participationist theology of Pseudo-Dionysius—our participation in God is by grace and not by nature.<sup>46</sup>

## II

If Sherrard is an advocate of Christian Platonist participationist metaphysics, or, more precisely, of participationist Christology, as the preceding exposition shows, then it stands to reason that he would also urge the importance of recovering a Christian Platonist epistemology. And, indeed, throughout his writings, he emphasizes that it is only through our “spiritual consciousness,” our *nous* or *intellectus*, that we can attain true knowledge. He consistently stresses that *dianoia* or *ratio*—discursive reason—requires contact with the trans-temporal and trans-spatial realities of the Logos of God if it is to connect with the eternal meaning of finite beings and to carry out sound deductions.<sup>47</sup> Lacking contact with the archetypal realities of being, *ratio* becomes the base instrument of ego-consciousness and a mere tool for our self-gratification.<sup>48</sup> We can only see the hidden depths of being, Sherrard argues, if we are moved by the proper mode of consciousness, which must be shaped by intimate union with God through religious contemplation.

In many ways, Sherrard's emphasis on the primacy of the intellect over pure reason is similar to the uncovering of the “reasons of the heart” by the modern Augustinian tradition in the West, although Sherrard obviously sees himself as much more in the line of the Alexandrian tradition of Clement and Origen than in the line of



St. Augustine. Sherrard insists on the recovery of Christian gnosis, which he considers to be a particularly Eastern Christian concern. He argues that the sacramental activation of *nous* or *intellectus* is a religious imperative: we must, he insists, seek to know the world truly in Christ.<sup>49</sup> The crisis of our time is for Sherrard (as for Guénon, in fact) primarily a gnoseological crisis.<sup>50</sup> Sherrard's doctrine emphasizes the noetic culmination of human experience in Christ. He does not, it is true, emphasize charity in the way that Benedict and the Augustinian tradition do, yet his theandric anthropology can easily be turned in support of this emphasis. After all, it is as true if not truer for Augustine as for any Church Father that charity is a gift that we receive only by incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a general axiom of the Church Fathers, in both the East and the West, that in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit our perfection in knowledge coincides with our perfection in love. There is, moreover, an acknowledgment in Sherrard, as in Pascal, that purity of heart and love of truth are the necessary preconditions for knowing the truth.

Sherrard sees the idolatry of discursive reason—nonsacramental, a sham gnosis—as the worst of all sins besetting modern man. Having locked himself in his own immanence, modern man has pushed forth discursive reason as the highest faculty of knowledge, presuming that he can know the reality of cosmic being without being informed by the intellect's contact with super-sensible or metaphysical realities.<sup>51</sup> He takes it as a dogmatic assumption that the way to get at the truth of the beings of nature is by means of mathematical analysis of the data of sensory experience.<sup>52</sup> His sense of the true reality of knowledge is, as a result, sorely misguided. He is operating in the wrong mode of consciousness, allowing himself to be dominated by mathematical quantities.<sup>53</sup> The end result is to eliminate all meaningful existence, including human intelligence, from the category of the real.<sup>54</sup> In sum, Sherrard's epistemology contains a trenchant diagnosis of the modern tendency to reduce man to nothing more than a constructive or deconstructive subjec-

tivity, no longer dwelling within a world of essential meanings and objective perceptions and experiences.

This diagnosis is a powerful jolt that forces us to confront the consequences of our self-banishment from the universe. What happens to us or to the world if we no longer understand our inner experiences as having an existence that is meaningfully compatible with the category of truth? This is ultimately the question we must face, having placed ourselves under the reign of quantity. Given this situation of self-imposed exile, we can at best envision ourselves as a packet of fleeting whims and willfulness, whose only reason for being is to pursue those whims wherever they may lead us. All cosmic reality can be for us but mathematical limit or pattern whose only "purpose" is to lie before our sovereign volition as a formless grid to be dissected and manipulated according to our basest desires. We are left only subjectively to impose values on the world where there is objectively nothing good to be discerned. There is no eternal, archetypal grounding for these imposed values. There is no standard of truth, goodness, or beauty that we must nurture in our use of the physical universe.

Sherrard compels us to see, as an essential precondition for the recovery of a sure-footed environmental ecology, that we must heal our human ecology by suffusing it once again with the undiminished sacred wisdom of our religious heritage. His critique is laden with positive suggestions and implications, but these are strong medicine. They would have us recognize that a Christian theologian who wishes to be a truly effective ecologist must be a proponent of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy and a defender of the high liturgical tradition that uplifts the intellect by contact with the archetypal realities that govern the universe. Sherrard prescribes prayer and contemplation as the medicine that we need most of all, the essential remedy that alone can heal our sick souls, our lost sense of humanity and of the world. The Eucharist of the Church, on his diagnosis and prescription, is not only "the medicine of immortality," as it has always been understood, but of participatory justice on earth.<sup>55</sup>

He thus has much to teach us about the relationship of human ecology to environmental ecology and his work could give a fully theandric perspective to the Christological integral humanism that has become so explicitly a part of the Church's social doctrine, not least of all in *Caritas in veritate*. Obviously, his analysis cannot be appropriated without criticism by the Western theologian. In addition to problematic aspects of it that I have already mentioned, it should be pointed out that his totalizing critique of modern science, however valuable in moving the discussion of modern cosmology onto the plane of theological metaphysics, is obviously not fully in line with the more balanced suggestions in *Caritas in veritate*. Nevertheless, Sherrard's theoanthropocosmic vision of reality and call for restitution of the Christian sacred is what is needed in our time, and, I might add, in some profound ways coheres with Benedict's larger theological project. It would not be too much to say that for the Holy Father, as for Sherrard, the Chalcedonian doctrine in its fullest implications and liturgical renewal are essential for the effective realization of social and ecological justice.

### Notes

1. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 4:51.
2. On the patristic doctrine of man the microcosm, cf. Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 25 (Copenhagen, C.W.K. Gleerup, Lund and Einar Munksgaard, 1965).
3. Cf. Louis Bouyer, *Cosmos: The World and the Glory of God*, trans. Pierre de Fontnouvelle (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1988); Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume II: The World: Creation and Deification*, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000).
4. Cf. Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition* (Limni, Greece: Denise Harvey Publishing, 1992). This book could serve as a primer on Eastern Orthodox complaints against the Western Church.
5. Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Louis Bouyer had already thoroughly exculpated the Western tradition from radical critiques along the lines of Sherrard's. The work of Dr. Jacques Albert Cottat is also of enduring importance in

showing the unique genius of the Western tradition in regard to its Christological and trinitarian centering. Cuttat also deals with the Guénonians in general. See Cuttat, *The Encounter of Religions*, trans. Pierre de Fontnouvelle (New York: Desclée Company, 1960). More recently, theologians of a “radically orthodox” bent have demonstrated anew the “theandric” depths of the theologies of St. Augustine and St. Thomas. Cf. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

6. For a wider perspective on Sherrard, see Kathleen Raine, *Philip Sherrard (1922–1995): A Tribute* (Birmingham: The Delos Press, 1996). One can say that Sherrard’s thinking is in line with the *ressourcement* theology of twentieth-century thought in his plea for the recovery of what Hans Boersma has called a “sacramental ontology.” For the twentieth-century Western tradition in this regard, see Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
7. For an historical account of Guénon’s influence, see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Sedgwick’s work is journalistic and conspiratorial in tone, but it does give a sense of the scope of Guénon’s influence.
8. Philip Sherrard, *Christianity and the Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 76–77.
9. It would be enough to inventory some of the names associated, either directly or indirectly, with Guénon—but all of whom acknowledge their indebtedness to his radical critique of scientism: E. F. Schumacher; Ananda Coomaraswamy; Henry Corbin; Fritjof Schuon; Aldous Huxley; Mircea Eliade; Titus Burckhardt (the great-nephew of Jacob Burckhardt); Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Thomas Merton; Huston Smith; Wolfgang Smith; Jean Borella.
10. Summing up the Guénonian school in this regard is the work of Seyyed Hosein Nasr. See Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
11. Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Golgonooza Press, 1987), 70.
12. Cf. Philip Sherrard, *The Sacred in Life and Art* (Cambridge: Golgonooza Press, 1990).
13. Sherrard, “The Meaning of Sacred Tradition,” in *Christianity and the Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*, 1–26.
14. On this whole paragraph, see *ibid.*
15. This is the central thesis of his aforementioned book. See Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image* (Cambridge: Golgonooza Press, 1992).
16. *Ibid.*, 4.
17. Cf. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theologies for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row,

- 1988).
18. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 4.
  19. *Ibid.*, 5.
  20. Cf. Arnold Toynbee, in David and Eileen Springs, ed., *Ecology and Religion in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–7.
  21. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 147–81. Sherrard seeks the recovery of a doctrine of creation that balances the understanding that creation is from nothing with an understanding that creation is also from God, as is found, for instance, in some expressions of the tradition of the Rhineland mystics and the Christian Kabbalah.
  22. Cf. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 42.
  23. See Alasdair MacIntyre's comments regarding the derisory nature of the epitaph "Platonism" as it is often used to describe Gottlieb Frege's work. In *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue: 1913–1922* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006), 43.
  24. Cf. Louis Bouyer, *The Eternal Son*, trans. Simone Inkel and John F. Laughlin (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1979), 295–301.
  25. For a particularly good discussion of the implications of the Chalcedonian tradition in this regard, see Louis Bouyer, *Sophia ou le Monde en Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 123–32.
  26. Cf. René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Sign of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1953).
  27. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 77–101.
  28. *Ibid.*, 50–51.
  29. For an account of Balthasar's meta-anthropology on this point, see Rodney A. Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clarke, 2009), 50–53.
  30. This point was summed up in the writings of St. Maximus the Confessor. On the importance of Maximus the Confessor, Hans Urs von Balthasar's famous and groundbreaking study retains its immense importance. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).
  31. Cf. Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, 23.
  32. *Ibid.*, 25.
  33. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 61–109.
  34. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 155–56.
  35. Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, 25.
  36. *Ibid.*, 17.
  37. On all of the foregoing, see *ibid.*, 17–41.
  38. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 176–81.
  39. Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, 27.
  40. *Ibid.*, 28.

41. See Robert Sokolowski's insightful comments on Heidegger in this regard in "Being My Way," *First Things* 89 (January 1999): 51–54.
42. As Boersma shows, this recognition is the founding insight of "la nouvelle théologie."
43. Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, 17.
44. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 124.
45. In *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), gives a very important exposition in the context of a discussion of the theology of icons of the unique importance of the Western tradition of iconography, with its focus on the passion and the Cross of Christ, in contradistinction to the Eastern tradition, with its focus on the cosmological and universal dimensions of Christ's glorifying self-revelation. Although stressing the need for a balance between East and West in this regard, the Holy Father has nevertheless always been insistent that the unique genius of the Western tradition, particularly as it is expressed in the medieval and early modern period, should not be denigrated for the sake of a purely archeological return to the cosmological focus of the East. See Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 115–35.
46. See Boersma's discussion of Balthasar, in *Nouvelle Théologie*, 117–35.
47. See the discussion by Kallistos Ware in the foreword to Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*, xxiv–xxv.
48. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 8–11.
49. Cf. Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, 29–41.
50. See René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Marco Pallis, Arthur Osborne, and Richard C. Nicholson (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001).
51. Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image*, 77–101.
52. *Ibid.*, 33–55.
53. *Ibid.*, 2. The idea that man's mode of consciousness determines his capacity to see the depths of being was a common theme among the Guénonians as well as in Sherrard.
54. *Ibid.*, 39–40.
55. I am in agreement with Kallistos Ware's assessment, in his foreword to Sherrard's *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (ix–xlv), that Sherrard is, in the end, a fundamentally orthodox Christian thinker in the tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy. Though the Eastern tradition conceives of the nature of the Church in more pneumatic terms than the Western Church does, it is nevertheless as true for the East as it is for the West that it is only through sacramental participation in the Eucharist of the Church that one can have full access to God's deifying grace.