

2017

Pneumatological sacramentality and cosmic humanity

Keith Ka-fu Chan

*Hong Kong Baptist University*, s179007@hkbu.edu.hk

This document is the authors' final version of the published article.

Link to published article: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/476687>

---

#### APA Citation

Chan, K. (2017). Pneumatological sacramentality and cosmic humanity. *Paul Tillich and Asian religions*, 221-238. Retrieved from [https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/hkbu\\_staff\\_publication/6304](https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/hkbu_staff_publication/6304)

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by HKBU Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in HKBU Staff Publication by an authorized administrator of HKBU Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact [repository@hkbu.edu.hk](mailto:repository@hkbu.edu.hk).

Keith CHAN Ka-fu

# Pneumatological Sacramentality and Cosmic Humanity

Tillich, Orthodox Theology and Confucianism

## 1 Introduction

Both Judeo-Christian traditions and western philosophical traditions are commonly criticized for anthropocentrism and dualism, which are regarded as issues central to the global environmental crisis. However, western dualistic conceptuality, with its demarcation between transcendence and immanence, and a hierarchical mode of thinking are now being challenged by movements, such as radical eco-egalitarianism, ecofeminism, the deep ecological movement, and posthumanism. From these perspectives, the emergence of secularization results in the divine absence from the world, and promotes a scientific-technological mindset which consolidates human rationality and subjectivity, and which deepens the western ecological crisis.

Recently, attempts to explore the ecological implications in different religious traditions have brought balance to the above highly generalized picture. These studies insist that religion should not be regarded as bankruptcy in dealing with the environmental crisis, but rather that it provides fruitful and promising resources for us to re-think the ecological question from a different angle. In this context, the east-west religious-ecological dialogue establishes a platform in which different religious traditions try to articulate the inter- and intra-textual readings of the other (as well as their own) in order to explore numerous potentialities and possibilities for ecological thinking.

Under the categories, “sacramentality” and “cosmic anthropology,” this paper attempts to argue that cosmology and anthropology, expressed in the Orthodox tradition, Confucianism and Paul Tillich’s work, share a similar ontological and cosmic vision which is relational, dynamic and universal in nature. Also, these three lenses emphasize the uniqueness of the human being in the universe without committing to anthropocentrism. This paper will demonstrate that a human being can be regarded as the “center” but not the “master” of the world. These three lenses find no difficulty in the assertion that a human being can be “being-in-the-world” and “being-above-the -world” at the same time. Thirdly, re-enchantment of the world seems for them to provide an oppor-

tunity for the renewal of human spirituality in which instrumental rationality about the world should be reconsidered in order to perceive the world as a sacrament, a gift, and a living organism instead of a huge mechanical machine. Also, adherents of these lenses uphold an anthropocosmic vision which emphasizes the interrelationship between human beings and nature, communication between self and community, and the mutuality between humans and God (Heaven). I will firstly argue that Tillich's notion of sacramentality is ontological-universal in character and that this concept expresses the nature of the multi-dimensionality in the universe which is based on his pneumatology. Likewise, in the Orthodox tradition, the universe is also regarded as the sacrament in which the essence of all beings is grounded in the *Logos*. This sacramental thinking, inspired by Christology, conceives the world as a symbol pointing to its divine Creator. In Confucian cosmogony, transcendence and immanence are inter-related within a dynamic and holistic whole in which the underlying principle of the universe is wholly embodied within the structure of the world. Secondly, I will argue that the notion of the "cosmic humanity" is the key concept of these three lenses. In both Tillich's and Orthodox teachings, the human being is regarded as a "microcosm" in which different dimensions of the universe are embraced in the human being who is understood as the highest being in Tillich's anthropology and the priest of the cosmos in Orthodox teachings. In Confucianism, the essential part of the human being is connected with the transcendent Heaven, and the human being is mandated the duty of the creative transformation of the world by the Heaven. Finally, in concluding the paper, the ecological implication of these three lenses will be explored.

## 2 Christian Sacramentality and Confucian Cosmogony:<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Paul Tillich's Pneumatological Perspective

In his volume three of *Systematic Theology*, Tillich expressed a dynamic and unifying perspective towards a multi-dimensional understanding of life. For him, the concept of "life" embraces different "dimensions" in which the interplay be-

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the understanding of the meaning of sacrament or sacramentality in the Catholic churches has undergone a developmental and changing history; see Mathai Kadavil, *The World as Sacrament: Sacramentality of Creation from the Perspectives of Leonardo Boff, Alexander Schmemmann and Saint Ephrem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

tween potentiality and actuality is intertwined. Therefore, nothing should be reduced as “thing” only. As he emphasized, “no thing in nature is merely a thing.”<sup>2</sup> Nature is viewed neither as the scientific-technological object nor the magical substance, but is to be perceived theologically as “the finite expression of the infinite ground of all things.”<sup>3</sup> Tillich’s “*infra Lutheranum*” background allows him to adopt the mutual indwelling of the two natures of Jesus Christ in whom the presence of infinite in everything finite is theologically possible; in addition, Schelling’s idealist philosophy of nature provided him with the ground of the philosophical identity between human and nature. Based on his understanding of the ontological-universal structure of being-itself, God is the ground and the power of beings. Every being is grounded in the innermost part of the God’s being. Therefore, all objects or events become a medium functioning as a sacramentality in which the transcendent is perceived to be present.<sup>4</sup>

In his early essay, “Nature and Sacrament,” Tillich outlined some more common conceptions of nature: magical-sacramental, rational-objective, vitalistic, and symbolic-romantic. The magical-sacramental view of nature considers everything to be filled “with a sort of material energy which gives to things and to parts of things, even to the body and the parts of the body, a sacral power.”<sup>5</sup> However, that there has never been a merely magical relation to nature is most impressively and consistently expressed by mathematical physics and the technical control of nature. In the vitalistic philosophy of nature, everything, the whole world-process, is envisaged as an expression of life, and an immediate power of being is attributed to things. In this philosophy “nature recovers its power again, but it is a power without meaning; and power without meaning is ultimately impotent.”<sup>6</sup> “The symbolic-romantic interpretation of nature attempts to give back to nature its qualitative character, its depth, its meaningfulness, by interpreting nature as a symbol of the spirit. The power of things is the power of soul or spirit in them.”<sup>7</sup> This view provides rich possibilities for interpretation but, again, it is not a sufficient view: this view “is very little aware of the real structure of nature. It gives us the creations of an arbitrary imagination. The quantitative, calculable “nature” of physics is certainly not overcome by it;

---

2 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume Three (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 34.

3 Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflection,” *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, eds. Charles Kegley & Robert Bretall (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1956), 4.

4 Tillich, “Nature and Sacrament,” *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 108.

5 *Ibid.*, 100.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

only subjective imagination has been added.”<sup>8</sup> All these fail in some crucial way to bridge the dualism of matter and spirit/ mind with reality. Tillich proposed a “new realism” in which power and meaning are found within physical nature and historical reality, not superimposed upon them. “The power and meaning of nature must be sought within and through its objective physical structures. Power and physical character, meaning and objective structure, are not separated in nature. We cannot accept the word of mathematical science as the last word about nature, although we do not thereby deny that it is the first word.”<sup>9</sup> Significantly, according to Tillich, “the power of nature must be found in a sphere prior to the cleavage of our world into subjectivity and objectivity. Life originates on a level, which is “deeper” than the Cartesian duality of cogitation and extensio. (“thought” and “extension”)<sup>10</sup> Tillich expressed,

If nature is interpreted in this realistic and, at the same time, historical way, natural objects can become bearers of transcendent power and meaning, they can become sacramental elements ... Nature, by being brought into the context of the history of salvation, is liberated from its ambiguity. Its demonic quality is conquered in the new being in Christ. Nature is not the enemy of salvation; it does not have to be controlled in scientific, technical, and moral terms to be deprived of any inherent power, in order to serve the “Kingdom of God,” ... nature is a bearer and an object of salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Although Tillich emphasized that the character or quality of nature itself is closely related with the sacred power it symbolizes, those qualities are only to be considered as the *bearer* of a sacred power. Therefore, the quality of the natural object is the necessary but not sufficient condition for becoming a sacrament. In his volume one of *Systematic Theology*, based on the universal-ontological understanding of being-itself, Tillich insisted that nothing is excluded from the participation in the ultimate ground of beings, and nothing is qualified and worthy in itself to represent the ultimate concern. This is the reason why the whole reality has become a medium of revelation but never identified with the divine.<sup>12</sup> The power and meaning of nature are disclosed through, but not in, objective physical structure. Tillich emphasized that the subjective and objective approach towards the understanding of nature is not sufficient. In this context, Tillich tend-

---

**8** Ibid., 101.

**9** Ibid., 101–102

**10** Ibid., 102.

**11** Ibid., 102–103.

**12** Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume One (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 118.

ed to accept nature as embodying a kind of symbolic character in revealing something ultimate.

For Tillich, the whole theology of sacramentality relies on a theology of symbol in which the sacramental material is not only a sign, but also stands for a symbol that participates in what it signifies and is intrinsically related to what it expresses.<sup>13</sup> The theology of symbol is closely related with his notion of self-transcending realism (*gläubiger Realismus*). As Tillich noted, “self-transcending realism is a universal attitude toward reality. It is neither a merely theoretical view of the world, nor a practical discipline for life ... it is a basic attitude in every realm of life, expressing itself in the shaping of every realm.”<sup>14</sup> This type of realism confirms the concrete form of nature as the embodiment of spiritual power and meaning. Following Tillich’s “*Form-Inhalt-Gehalt*” framework of theology of culture, the spiritual *Gehalt* reveals its power and meaning through natural forms and structures. Tillich insisted, “the new realism was not interested in the natural forms of things for their own sake, but for their power of expressing the profounder levels and the universal significances of things.”<sup>15</sup> Through the given natural forms, this realism functions as symbolic embodiment and “tries to point to the spiritual meaning of the real by using its given form.”<sup>16</sup> For this reason Tillich rejected both the Catholic idea of transubstantiation, which transforms a symbol into a thing to be handled, and the reformed tradition of the sign character of the sacramental symbol.<sup>17</sup> Considering the Catholic side, nature as symbol representing spiritual power is not functioning as “*opus operatum*” in order to receive objective grace from the divine power and, considering the reformed side, it is also not a sign for the faith community to remember the divine saving event. In sum, nature as symbol participates in the power of what it symbolizes, and therefore, it can be a medium of the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

In Tillich’s early demonstration of sacramental thinking, Christology and soteriology are linked with the power of a sacramental bearer. In order to attack magical and mythological usage, the Protestant tradition needs to bring nature into the context of the history of salvation so that the demonic quality of nature is conquered in the New Being in Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup> “Any sacramental reality within

---

13 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume Three (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 123.

14 Tillich, “Realism and Faith,” *The Protestant Era*, 67.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume Three, 123.

18 Ibid.

19 Tillich, “Nature and Sacrament,” *The Protestant Era*, 102–103.

the framework of Christology and of Protestantism must be related to the New Being in Christ.”<sup>20</sup> For Tillich, the New Being created by Jesus as the Christ is the new creation universe. Moreover, in his Christology, the essential Godmanhood manifesting within the existential and historical conditions is interpreted not merely as a religious personality, but as a basic divine sacramental reality.<sup>21</sup> Cosmic Christ as the New Being also represents the paradoxical character of the divine symbol in which “the absolute side of the final revelation, that in it which is unconditional and unchangeable, involves the *complete transparency* and the complete self-sacrifice of the medium in which it appears.”<sup>22</sup>

However, the above Christological orientation shifted into a pneumatological perspective in volume three of *Systematic Theology*. In that work, Tillich tried to develop the doctrine of pneumatology in order to answer numerous criticisms on one hand, and to re-articulate his theological perspectives in the light of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit on the other.<sup>23</sup> Though Tillich emphasized that the divine spirit is essentially correlated with the human spirit, it does not exclude the Spiritual Presence indwelling into the whole multi-dimensional unity of life. Given the rejection of dualistic and supernaturalist reduction, spiritual power and meaning manifests as the “dimension of the ultimate” or “the dimension of depth.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the universality of the Spiritual Presence is the expression of the radical effective embodiment of personal and historical events. Therefore, for Tillich, we have no reason to adopt the narrow sense of the concept of “sacramental” in which some particular objects and acts are qualified as the medium for the experience of divine spirit in a faith community, but, rather, Tillich enlarged the sense to cover *everything* in which the Spiritual Presence has been experienced.<sup>25</sup> The spiritual community “is free to appropriate *all* symbols which are adequate and which possess symbolic power.”<sup>26</sup> In traditional Christianity, word and sacrament come together. For Tillich, under the impact of Spiritual

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>21</sup> Tillich, “The Author’s Introduction,” *The Protestant Era*, xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume one (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 151. Italics are mine.

<sup>23</sup> For the interplay between Christology and pneumatology in the development of Tillich’s theology, see my article, “Paul Tillich’s Understanding of Theology: A Pneumatological Christological Perspective,” *Sino-Christian Studies: An International Journal of Bible, Theology & Philosophy* 20 (2015), 33–86.

<sup>24</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology* volume three, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 121. Italics are mine.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 123. Italics are mine.

Presence, all human spoken word and the biblical written word are the mediators of the Spirit.

## 2.2 Orthodox Cosmic Liturgy<sup>27</sup>

If Tillich's final articulation of the divine presence in the finite were located into his pneumatological sacramentality, the Orthodox understanding of the world as sacrament would heavily rely on Christology. According to Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983), a Russian Orthodox priest, the elements of the Eucharist reveal something really fundamental about the world in which we go about our daily lives.<sup>28</sup> The “ultimate” meaning of the matter used in a sacrament could better be regarded as matter unveiled to reveal something about the divine. This “sacramental quality” is entailed in Orthodox teaching about the world as a sacramental cosmology.<sup>29</sup> In the doctrine of creation and salvation, Orthodox teaching insists that the original beauty of the created world is the reflection of the glory of the Creator; there is an ontological linkage between the Creator and the creature. The whole world is understood as an icon to symbolize the divine. Also, the cosmic fall points to the suffering of all things. Human and Earth are bound together into an integrated whole under the economy of God's saving activity.

Greek Patristic thought originally articulated the above ontological correspondence between the Creator and the created in which the concept of *logoi* shares with, and is created by, the divine *Logos*. The Patristic theologians, such as Origen, adopted the Stoics' idea of *spermatikos logos*, which rejected the materialistic understanding of God, and emphasizes divine *Logos* is present in all things. Likewise, Origen combined the transcendence of the Platonic archetype with the immanent presence of the Stoic *spermatikoi logoi* as the differentiated articulation of the single divine *Logos* who is also the divine Wisdom.<sup>30</sup> To perceive the *logoi* in the created world is in the act known as *theōria physikē*, which translates roughly as natural contemplation, through self-denial and

---

<sup>27</sup> The term, cosmic liturgy, is borrowed by Hans Urs von Balthasar's book title, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003),

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The World as Sacrament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965).

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (NY: ST. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 181–182.

<sup>30</sup> David Bradshaw, “The Logoi of beings in Greek Patristic Thought,” *Towards an Ecology of Transformation: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*. Eds. John Chryssavgis & Bruce V. Foltz (NY: Fordham University Press, 2013), 9–13.



other related virtues such as forgiveness, obedience and charity. In St. Dionysius the Areopagite, nature is more like theophany because the whole reality points beyond itself to its divine source. It seems that the liturgical understanding about the sensible world offers a mystical contemplation of the unity of the world and God.

This theological climax was found in later Greek Father, St. Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662); he clearly believed the sensible world to be a kind of cosmic liturgy. He argued that all the *logoi* of beings subsist as one in an incomprehensible simplicity. The divine *Logos* has possessed all the *logoi* of particular beings from all eternity, and they are gathered together in Christ. Therefore, “the one *Logos* is many *logoi*” expresses the uncreated within the created according ultimately to God’s plan.<sup>31</sup> For Maximus the Confessor, created beings participate in God through the *logoi*, through this dynamism is lacking in Plato’s idea of Forms. The whole cosmos is moving towards the fulfillment, which is the ultimate union with God. The *logoi* of beings may be obscured but not be distorted. As he said, “nothing that is natural is opposed to God.”<sup>32</sup> Maximus the Confessor insists that human contemplation of the *logoi* of the created beings to be a mode of communication with the divine *Logos* leading to mystical union with God. According to Alexei Nesteruk, this communicating mode is a kind of “spiritual vision of reality in which the ontological roots of things and beings have their grounds beyond the world.”<sup>33</sup> This spiritual orientation towards the created world is to contemplate all sensible creation in its oneness through finding that all the *logoi* of sensible things can be united in one divine *Logos*, which constitutes the principle of creation.<sup>34</sup>

Because the created *logoi* is originally and finally linked with the *Logos*-Christ, it follows that the ontological status of the whole creation is Christologically based. Therefore, the doctrine of *logoi* is not merely a doctrine of metaphysical principle in a cosmological sense, but it is also a multidimensional doctrine bearing on the whole divine economy of creation and redemption.<sup>35</sup> In the teachings of Maximus the Confessor, the cosmic *Logos* is incarnated into a threefold

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19. See also, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 154–157.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Louth, “Man and Cosmos in St. Maximus the Confessor,” *Towards an Ecology of Transformation: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, 62–63.

<sup>33</sup> Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Light from the East: Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 25.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 66–67.

presence: historical person, Jesus; scripture; and also in the whole reality.<sup>36</sup> “The incarnation thus gave expression to the cosmic importance of Christ, for through the differentiation of things and their *logoi*, in which Christ the *Logos* is present, one can contemplate their unity in the one *Logos* of God and through them ascend with the incarnate Christ to the Father.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the uncreated and created, the spiritual and the material, the sensible and the nonsensible, are united and bound into the truth and the grace of God who leads the whole of creation finds its ultimate fulfillment through the human contemplation and practice. This Orthodox idea of the cosmic liturgy provides the re-enchantment of the world without committing to the charge of pantheism. The Orthodox theology upholds the doctrine of “difference in unity” in which the mystery of the God and the world are maintained even though they constitute a kind of sacramental reality.

### 2.3 The Confucian Cosmogony

Generally speaking, the western dualistic conceptuality is not found in the Chinese holistic and organic world view; instead, the poles of transcendence and immanence integrate within each other to construct a more dynamic and developmental cosmic whole. The genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of an organismic process, meaning that all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process.<sup>38</sup> According to TU Weiming, continuity, wholeness and dynamism are the three characters of the Chinese vision of the cosmos. The reality is regarded as a huge continuum in which nothing is outside of it. In rejecting dualistic thinking, nature is perceived under holistic thinking, and the whole reality is not static in a sense that vitality and dynamism always perform in a process-oriented way. In Neo-Confucianism, the dynamic ordering pattern (*li*) and the vital energies (*qi*) emanate from the ultimate Great (*taiji*). The latter performs as the basic structure and function of the cosmos and it penetrates into the former. Therefore, the ultimate principle of the universe is the ultimate One and it differentiates itself into the diverse structures and patterns in order to form dif-

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Light from the East: Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Weiming Tu, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. Ed. J. Baird Callicott (NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 67–78.

ferent beings. In this context, the transcendent principle and the immanent forms are not dualistic but functions as polar interaction. This philosophy of *Qi* becomes the focus in Zhang Zai's philosophy. *Qi* functions as the cosmic force to unite everything in the universe, and it is embodied into the human mind to embrace the pluralist and diverse conditions in everything into an integral whole.<sup>39</sup>

Nature is a relational whole in which human life and the rhythms of nature that sustain life in both its biological needs and socio-cultural expressions operate together. Everything in nature is interdependent, interrelated, dynamic and transformational. Nature, therefore, is inherently valuable and morally good. Value lies in the ongoing transformation and productivity of nature. TU Weiming asserted that Confucian ontology is regarded as the continuity of being in which all modalities of being are organically connected.<sup>40</sup> Spiritual and material realms are co-related under the vital force. All beings, whether living or non-living, consist of this vital force. Without the concept of a creator God and the Christian idea of creation out of nothing, Confucian thought emphasizes a spontaneously self-generating life process within which all beings, human and non-human, are integral parts of an organic continuum.<sup>41</sup> Under this way of thinking, human and nature share the same cosmic creative force, so that a kind of kinship relationship develops between them.

### 3 Cosmic Anthropology: Microcosms, Mediator and the Great Man

#### 3.1 Human Being as Microcosms: Tillich

For Tillich, human beings are not merely one of the creatures among other living creatures. In a Heideggerian sense, only human beings can be aware of the structure of the being. The uniqueness of the human being is not based on supremacy among all living beings, or that the human being is regarded as *animal rationale* in an Aristotelian sense. For Tillich, the notion, *human*, means that the one is aware of the finitude and potential infinity.<sup>42</sup> His doctrine of *Imago Dei* points

---

<sup>39</sup> See Jung-Yeup Kim, *Zhang Zai's Philosophy of Qi: A Practical Understanding* (Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Weiming Tu, "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature," in *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology* volume one, 258.

out that, in the human being, the ontological elements are complete and are united on a creature basis, on one hand, and, on the other hand, are united with God as the creative ground.<sup>43</sup> The above double ontological structures constitute, firstly, the human being as the mediator between the divine and all other beings. Tillich adopted a classical notion that the human being is the *microcosm*<sup>44</sup> because all dimensions – inorganic, organic, psychic, spiritual and historical – are all present and actualized in the human being.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, the ontological structure of the human being is analogous to the divine *Logos* that means the *ground of being mandates the telos of a human being*. Based on this anthropological understanding, the fulfillment of the created purposiveness of creation is dependent on the actualization of human finite freedom. No other beings are constructed and required to fulfill the above mandate. We would say that the role of the human being is a co-creator (Philip Hefner's phrase),<sup>46</sup> "God is primarily and essentially creative; man is secondarily and existentially creative."<sup>47</sup>

In Tillich's volume three of *Systematic Theology*, his anthropology is well constructed within the whole being of the universe. Against the metaphor of "levels," Tillich prefers the imagery of "dimensions" to describe the different intersecting of all kinds of *zoe*, rather than *bio*-sphere only. The choice reflects the dislocating of the hierarchical matrix and centering on the blurring and mixing of the organic flow of different dimensions of life. All dimensions – inorganic, organic, psychic, spiritual and historical – cross their boundaries without losing their own identities. The multi-dimensionality of life "describes the difference of the realms of being in such a way that there cannot be mutual interference; depth does not interfere with breadth, since all dimensions meet in the same point. They cross without disturbing each other; there is no conflict between dimensions ... these conflicts are not denied, but they are not derived from the hierarchy of levels; they are the consequences of the ambiguity of all life processes."<sup>48</sup> The interpenetration and fusion within poly- and trans- dimensionality constitutes an interactive, dynamic and vitalist vision of the realities. The basic idea of Tillich's dynamic vision of all life forms is that all dimensions

---

43 Ibid., 259.

44 The concept, microcosms, originally comes from the Greek antiquity and it can be traced back to pre-Socratic times, and later was adopted and enriched by Greek Orthodox fathers, later on it can be found in the Renaissance philosophy and the German philosophy as well.

45 Ibid., 260.

46 P. Hefner, *The Human Factor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

47 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* volume one, 256.

48 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* volume three, 15.

are real but not always in actual status. Therefore, for Tillich, when someone encounters someone / something, it means that the one who encounters is the mixture of all dimensions, but some dimensions are in a potential stage, and some are in an actual stage. Even in the so-called inorganic realm, all other dimensions are potentially present. “In this sense one speaks of the vegetable realm or the animal realm or the historical realm. In all of them, all dimensions are potentially present, and some of them are actualized.”<sup>49</sup> For Tillich, the interplay of potentiality and actuality insists that there is no any metaphysical and transcendental core in any realms or dimensions. This non-essentialist approach of Tillich’s idea allows the ontological blurring of spirituality, humanity, animality and materiality.<sup>50</sup>

The above multi-dimensionality of all species presupposes a certain kind of evolutionary understanding. Tillich emphasized that the condition of the actualization of one dimension is that other previous dimensions have been actualized. Therefore, “the dimension of spirit would remain potential without the actualization of the organic.” The continuum within different dimensions expresses that there is no possibility of a clear-cut mechanism to allocate human “exceptionalism.” Therefore, although Tillich maintained that the human being is ontologically the highest being, he did not commit to an anthropocentric understanding.

### 3.2 Man as Mediator of the Cosmos: Orthodox Anthropology

According to Lars Thunberg, the idea of a human being as a microcosm can be traced back to Nemesius of Emessa.<sup>51</sup> Actually, the tradition of “human being as microcosm” has a long history deeply rooted in the Orthodox tradition. This divine task of being human is based on God’s creation plan in which the human being is located in an intermediary position in order to carry out the act through which all the created beings can gather together. That is the reason why a human being is the one combined with two oppositions; it implies that the vocation of

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>50</sup> For Tillich’s view on animality, see my paper, “Tillich on Animality.” (In process).

<sup>51</sup> Man as microcosm in Nemesius is interpreted as seeing the external universe reflected in man as in a mirror, and also emphasizes that all tensions created by the opposite and dualistic entities are reconciled in man. See Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Illinois: Open Court, 1995), 136.

being human should function as an image of the whole cosmos.<sup>52</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, based on the Scripture and the anthropology of the Orthodox tradition, emphasized that all levels of existence belonging to the various forms in the created world are to be found in human beings. The physiology of a human being has a direct relationship to Orthodox cosmology.<sup>53</sup> Firstly, the whole universe is ontologically connected with the created structure of the human being. That means, the completeness of the human manifests in a unified psychosomatic whole in which matter and spirit are formed together; it formulates the role of humanity as the bridge and point of contact for the whole of creation.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, the image of God in human does not mean that the human being is the master of other beings, but that human being are called to preserve and to fulfill the right orientation of the dynamism within the whole creation. The human being is placed in the world as the priest is standing between the world and God.<sup>55</sup>

St. Maximus the Confessor insisted that the human being is regarded as a microcosm (small universe) and the world as *makranthropos* (a man enlarged). This double and parallel constitution is mutually connected and united. The analogy between the world and the man should be transformed into a unity. Human being as mediator is attributed the task of unification of the universe.<sup>56</sup> For him, the incarnation of Christ is not the secondary measure caused by the fall, but in fact God wills Himself to be incarnated to be a real man in whom the perfection and fulfillment of the full task of mediation is anticipated.<sup>57</sup> According to Lars Thunberg, for Maximus the Confessor, Christology is the key to open the linkage between anthropology and cosmology.<sup>58</sup> His Christological anthropology and cosmology locates humans as the center of the created universe and also does justice to the cosmic implications of Christ's position and work of reconciliation.<sup>59</sup> It is well known that, in the Orthodox tradition, incarnation and deification forms a mutually hermeneutical circle. For Maximus the Confessor,

---

52 Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos. The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 73.

53 Anestis G. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment. A Study of St Symeon the New Theologian* (NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 42.

54 *Ibid.*, 45.

55 *Ibid.*

56 Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos. The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 74.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Aidan Nichols O.P., *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 158 – 195.

59 Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 142.

human being as macrocosm, who unites in himself / herself all that is differentiated without the expense of its integrity. The work of unification and mediation is the result of the human relationship with God in the doctrine of creation, and its eschatological fulfillment and actualization are interpreted as the union with God (deification), which is ultimately grounded, by the *Logos*-incarnated. (Incarnation)<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is no problem for Maximus the Confessor to talk about the divinization of the human being in a sense that “He remains wholly man in soul and body in nature, and becomes wholly God in body and soul by grace and by the unparalleled divine radiance of blessed glory.”<sup>61</sup>

### 3.3 Great Man in Confucianism

Human beings are not treated as the masters of the universe in Confucianism, because all beings in the world are included within the cosmic moral order. As Chang Tsai’s (Zhang Zai, 1020 – 1077) *Western Inscription* noted,<sup>62</sup> this cosmic moral order constitutes the basic ontological structural relationship between humans and other beings. Using the metaphor of kinship order, all beings in the world are arranged into an orderly relational structure. Humans are the sons / daughters of Heaven and Earth, and other non-human beings are regarded as our companions. It seems that, in Confucianism, “human beings are organically connected with rocks, trees and animals.”<sup>63</sup> In this sense, we can state that it is no problem for Confucianism to agree with the anti-anthropocentric approach of environmental ethics, that human and non-human beings should each have intrinsic value, because they are equal in the sense that all are subject to the transformative influence of Heaven and Earth.

However, Confucianism rejects certain kinds of eco-egalitarianism, which assume that an equal moral status is shared by human beings and other non-

---

60 Ibid. For the excellent study on the concept of deification in the Orthodox tradition, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For the study on Maximus the Confessor, see 262–295.

61 Quoted by Elena Vishnevskaya, “Divinization and Spiritual Progress in Maximus the Confessor,” *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*. Eds. Stephen Finlan & Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 137.

62 “Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I find an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.” Wing-tsit Chan, trans. and ed., *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 497.

63 Weiming Tu, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” in *Ibid.*, 113.

human beings. In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Heaven decrees human nature on the assumption that humankind receives, at least in potential, this mandate of Heaven in its highest excellence. Therefore, among the creatures in the cosmos, human beings are assumed to be the most sentient beings and the mandate that comes from Heaven establishes the ideal moral process and ideal personality as grounded in sincerity (*Cheng*, 誠).<sup>64</sup> In the *Doctrine of Mean*, the word “sincerity” is not only regarded as a human moral quality, being trustworthy to other people and oneself, but is also treated as an ethical ontological substance of Heaven and Earth. “Sincerity is a way of Heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of man.”<sup>65</sup> To be sincere is identical with developing and cultivating the potentiality of others. The Confucian ideal moral person is a person who can fully actualize the inner goodness mandated by Heaven, and then also cultivate others’ inner goodness in order to fulfill the ultimate self-cultivating ends in union with Heaven and Earth.

Based on the unity of human beings and non-human beings, Confucianism finds no difficulty in asserting the intrinsic value of all beings. However, under the above analysis, “Heaven-Human-Earth” consists of the organic and holistic worldview in which human beings should play a unique role: transformation of the moral potentiality of other beings in the world. In this sense, the Confucian tradition insists that the centrality of the human being in the cosmos is by virtue of cultivating and transforming the other. The unity of “Heaven-Human-Earth” is best illustrated in Wang Yangming (1472–1529)’s *Inquiry on the Great Learning*.<sup>66</sup> In the text, Wang emphasized that the Confucian “Great

---

64 “Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can then fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth.” Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, 108.

65 Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, 7.

66 “The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person ... That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he do so. Forming one body with Heaven, Earth and the myriad things is not only true of the great man. Even the mind of the small man is no different. Only he himself makes it small. Therefore when he sees a child about to fall into a well, he cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration. This shows that his humanity (*jen*) forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when he observes the pitiful cries and frightened appearance of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, he cannot help feeling an “inability to bear” their suffering. This shows that his humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and de-



Man” does not mean super-human, but a person who transforms and cultivates himself / herself to be an authentic person who, ontologically united with transcendent Heaven and immanent Earth on the one hand, and constituting a unifying body with other species on the other, is full of passion and compassion towards other beings that are also regarded as the creation of the Heaven and Earth. The concept of unity with other beings into a body upholds the intrinsic value of other beings; however, this does not mean that Confucianism will agree with eco-egalitarianism, which insists that all beings have equal value with others. The idea of the “degree of love” will insist that, in Confucianism, though non-human beings are the objects of moral compassion, the human social order has ontological and moral priority over the animal world.<sup>67</sup>

## 4 Environmental ethics: Tillich, Orthodox Theology and Confucianism

Recently, several studies have attempted to articulate the linkage between Orthodox traditions and ecology.<sup>68</sup> The sacramental cosmology presented by Orthodox tradition views the world not as an entity for human manipulation and domination, but as an icon or a sacrament embodied within, symbolizing the divine on the one hand, and creation, is regarded as a *gift* offered by God on the other.

---

stroyed, he cannot help ... feeling ... pity. This shows that his humanity forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as he is. Yet, even when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed, he cannot help ... feeling ... regret. This means that even the mind of the small man necessarily has the humanity that forms one body with all. Such a mind is rooted in his Heaven-endowed nature, and is naturally intelligent, clear and not beclouded. For this reason it is called ‘clear character.’” Wing-tsit Chan trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 659–660.

**67** For the question of how Confucianism’ views on animals, see Keith Ka-fu, Chan & Stephen Palmquist, “A Confucian-Kantian Response to Environmental Eco-Centrism on Animal Equality,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 2016 volume 43, issue 3–4 (forthcoming).

**68** Fr. Bartholomew I (1940–, he is well known as Green Patriarch) is undoubtedly an important figure of Orthodox tradition to deal with the ecological problem. See, *Cosmic Grace and Humble Prayer. The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I*. Ed. John Chryssavgis (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). Recently, some environmentalists start to be aware of the ecological contribution of the Orthodox tradition, and to cooperative with Orthodox theologians to explore the ecological significance. For their contributions see *Towards an Ecology of Transformation: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*. Eds. John Chryssavgis & Bruce V. Foltz (NY: Fordham University Press, 2013), and *Sacred Commerce: A Conversation on Environment, Ethics, and Innovation*. Eds. John Chryssavgis & Michele L. Goldsmith (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2014).

Therefore, the role of the universe is twofold: one is the mirror of the divine glory; the other is the object of thanks-giving towards God.<sup>69</sup> Nature as a whole is regarded as a symbolic system that is full of dynamic diversity in unity under the *logoi* created by God. As a symbol, nature participates and points to the divine. It does not commit to the idolatry of nature. Nature is never identified itself with the divine. However, through the richness and diversity of nature, we can see the glory and the presence of God. Following that line, Tillich's idea of the presence of Holy Spirit is embodied universally within the multi-dimensional unity of life; the pan-sacramentality provides the room for Tillich to embrace the idea of the cosmic liturgy of Orthodox traditions. Also, in Confucianism, the dynamic and unifying vision of the universe constitutes the principle of "unity in difference" in which all the diverse realities are sharing the "one fundamental principle." Confucian ethics encourages us to expand our human heart to love the other beings in the world.

Concerning anthropology, Orthodox traditions locate the man as the mediator between the God and the world. Comparing the stewardship of human beings with environmental thinking, the priest / mediator of the creation emphasized in Orthodox traditions highlights the religious role of human beings in treating the world as an offering gift to the Creator instead of adopting a "manager" metaphor in the concept of "stewardship" which tends to re-locate the subject-object relationship. For Orthodox traditions, an ecological problem is treated as a *spiritual* problem in the modern world. It implies that the authentic human role among other creatures has been distorted and abused. Following this line, Tillich also highlighted the human being as the "highest" being in the ontological sense, though this does not imply that he / she is the perfect one. Based on the universal fall of man and nature, the ambiguous character of all beings are all suffering with an alienated existential condition. For Tillich, man as macrocosm represents the ethical and religious tasks that man should fulfill.

For Tillich, under the impact of Spiritual Presence, the divine love, *agape*, is manifested. The *agape* manifests its power through the ontological structure of all beings, to bind all beings into a unified whole. Because the ontological structure of love is the reunion of the separated, the Spiritual *agape* transforms the human *eros* to embrace the universe. Compared with the Orthodox traditions and Confucianism, the love-quality of human being is also manifested in the role of man as the companion of other beings in the world. Human beings and other beings are fragile and are sharing the suffering of the world. In

---

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

order to love and to be loved, the Orthodox tradition emphasis the beauty of the cosmos, which is viewed by the transformed spirituality. That is why the ecological richness contained in the Orthodox theology is heavily found in Christian asceticism in which the greatest love for the beauty of creation is mentioned and human beings are purified by God's grace to "see" (*theoria*) the extraordinary depths of the universe (*theosis*).<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Bruce V. Foltz, "Traces of Divine Fragrance, Droplets of Divine Love: On the Beauty of Visible Creation," *Towards an Ecology of Transformation: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, 328–331.