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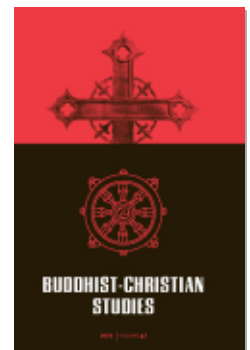
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Christian-Buddhist Hybridity-as-Hermeneutical-Lens Can
Suggest to the Theological Conversation on Ecology

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What Has Hybridity Got to Do with Ecology? What Christian-Buddhist Hybridity-as-Hermeneutical-Lens Can Suggest to the Theological Conversation on Ecology

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ABSTRACT

This essay offers some insights that “hybridity” utilized as a hermeneutical paradigm might contribute to the wider theological conversations going on about the global ecological crisis. The hybridity in question here is—what can be expressed as a—“Christian-Buddhist hybridity.” That refers to a sensibility that seriously takes into consideration the two spiritual–religious traditions of Christianity and Buddhism as a “hybrid way” to view the world in general and spiritual–religious–theological themes in particular.

This study will argue that, despite the significant gains in the Catholic Christian reflection on ecology achieved through Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*, it cannot be denied that Christian theology in general, as well as how it treats ecological themes in particular, is still fundamentally characterized by an anthropocentric focus that dualistically distinguishes too strongly between humans, on the one hand, and nature, on the other. Thus, Christian theological reflection on ecology might be helped and complemented by utilizing a nondual and unitive paradigm. One such paradigm is the Buddhist teaching on interbeing as expressed, for example, by teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh.

Moreover, the goal of hybridity (as a hermeneutical tool) is to build a world in which the thick wall between “us” and “them” can be hammered and broken down in favor of a new worldview in which the intimate connections among different worlds are highlighted and in which the presence of what we typically consider “other” is increasingly found within our very own selves. In that sense, Buddhism and aspects of the Dharma about *Sunyata* or Emptiness do seem to be a more effective means to realize hybridity’s goal of overcoming and transcending the radical divide between “us” and “them” (with “them” in this case being “Nature”).

KEYWORDS: Ecology, Hybridity, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis, Interbeing, Thich Nhat Hanh, Christian-Buddhist Studies

INTRODUCTION: "HYBRIDITY"

In this paper, I aim to identify some insights that hybridity-as-a-hermeneutical-paradigm might contribute to the wider theological conversations going on about the global ecological crisis. The end result of this process will be making the case that, despite the significant gains in the Catholic Christian reflection on ecology achieved through Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (2015, henceforward, LS), the anthropocentric focus of Christian theology in general might be aided in a significant way by taking into serious account the Buddhist teaching on interbeing expressed by teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh.

The hybridity in question here is what I'll express as a "Christian-Buddhist hybridity." By that, I refer to a sensibility that habitually takes into consideration the two spiritual-religious traditions of Christianity and Buddhism as a "hybrid way" to view the world in general and spiritual-religious-theological themes in particular. It is evidenced, for example, in theologian Paul Knitter's *Without Buddha I Could Not Be Christian* where he examines various themes by "passing over" to Buddhism and "passing back" to Christianity while drawing lessons from his—what I'll call here—hybrid lenses.¹ One may also see this in evidence in theologian-Zen Rōshi Ruben Habito's various works such as *Healing Breath: Zen for Christians and Buddhists in a Wounded World*² where he examines various aspects of spirituality again through Zen and Christian hybrid lenses. In a similar way, I will utilize here the conceptual tool of hybridity with all its nuances as it is understood, explained, and developed in the 2016 book *Religious Language and Asian {North} American Hybridity* (henceforward, RLAAH).³ What was discussed in that work will be treated as presuppositions for the proposed engagement between hybridity and ecology that I will attempt here. I am aware of course that most readers are not familiar with RLAAH so let me restate some preliminary observations on the hermeneutical lens of hybridity as it will be used in this paper based on the more elaborate exposition in RLAAH.⁴

It has become a truism to say that we are living in a globalized world. Two key features of our globalized world are: (i) hybridity and (ii) diaspora. In such a world, more and more people find that, through a number of circumstances such as immigration, multiracial parentage, or upbringing (my case), the experience of traveling to and staying for an extended time in unfamiliar and different places, relationships with diverse people, even the ubiquitous high tech means that connect us to the whole world instantaneously (among many other factors), they sense that they have come to *belong simultaneously* to "multiple worlds." In the dizzying array of combinations to be found nowadays, "worlds" may refer to ethnicities, cultures, nations, citizenships, or even spiritual-religious traditions, among other things. It is clear though that hybridity can no longer be neglected in today's globalized world because globalization's continuing effect is that quite a lot of people have acquired multiple worlds

within themselves, and these worlds have often become so fused with each other to the extent that they cannot be neatly divided into different and separate entities anymore. Thus, the term “hybrid” broadly understood can be applied to them.⁵

To describe the matter further, because of my personal context, I choose to qualify the notion of hybridity with the phenomenon of diaspora. Hence, in the particular kind of hybridity that I use as a conceptual tool, I include a complex of experiences frequently involving being uprooted from a homeland and moving either willingly or unwillingly to a new, often inhospitable place where one acquires a hybrid identity over time due to one’s location—using an expression from Korean-American theologian Jung Young Lee—“in-between and in both”⁶ two (or more) cultural worlds with which one can claim *some kind of* affiliation.⁷

WHY USE HYBRID LENSES?

What is the value of utilizing a hybrid lens to view the theological implications of the ecological crisis (or any other issue for that matter)? This paper stands on some foundational convictions: First, I maintain that when hybridity is explicitly invoked and utilized as a hermeneutical lens, it could yield many fresh insights about spiritual–religious–theological topics that would otherwise not be apparent or given prominence. Second, in our globalized and interconnected world, it is becoming more appropriate, it would seem, to invite people in a general way to acknowledge that they themselves are becoming hybrid in profound ways. The obvious reason is that our contemporary world is a place where there seems to be a continuous busy and rapid “churn” that is inexorably sweeping more and more people into a worldwide mix or—for want of a better term—a “globalized hybridity” as it were.⁸ To put it starkly, we are all turning hybrid in one way or another. When people realize and embrace this, the insights on different themes that hybridity could provide become more relevant, powerful, and urgent.

People with hybrid identities, as an ideal, should strive for balance in the midst of the diverse worlds they inhabit. If they could attain some measure of balance or succeed in holding these different worlds in relationships of creative tension, they would taste the sweet fruits of what—the theologian Rita Nakashima Brock has beautifully called—“interstitial integrity.”⁹

As for my concrete strategy in this study, I will envisage—what I shall call—a “hybrid interlocutor” (i.e., someone with a hybrid identity) who will engage in dialogue with the theme that we have chosen to explore here, namely, ecology and the ecological crisis vis-à-vis theological reflection.¹⁰ Our basic question then is: What does hybridity have to do with ecology? In particular, what insights could hybridity contribute to the theological conversations taking place today about the very urgent ecological crisis that faces all of us? We should keep in mind though that hybridity is never a detached and abstract notion floating as it were in a pure objective space. Rather, it is always a mixture of concrete ingredients. Hence, I specify this hybridity here, as mentioned above, as a religious sensibility or theological sense that takes both Christianity and Buddhism into serious consideration.

I will engage first with the Christian side of the hybridity as I converse with the theme of ecology within Catholic Christian theology while constantly and explicitly keeping in mind the hermeneutical tool of hybridity. I will limit my reflections in this section to the following two factors: First, the achievement of Pope Francis's encyclical *LS*,¹¹ and how it has enhanced the theme of ecology particularly within the Roman Catholic Church (and even beyond it); and, second, the critical issue that, despite the very positive effect of *LS*, there remains a gnawing sense in many people that there seems to be a fundamental limitation and weakness in the Christian tradition as it grapples with the ecological crisis.

CONVERSING WITH *LS*—"INTEGRAL" ECOLOGY

Since its publication in 2015, *LS* has been generally acknowledged as a significant, even defining theological development and achievement in Catholic teaching because, in this document, the supreme teaching authority of the Catholic Church (the Pope) engages in a careful and sustained manner with practically all the major subareas of the field of ecology in our contemporary world. A high point of the document is that it goes on to suggest a coherent Catholic Christian response to the present ecological crisis.

This hybrid interlocutor deeply resonates with Pope Francis's encyclical letter; in particular, the suggestion to consider ecological issues under the rubric he describes as "integral" (*LS*, ch. 4). To connect that more explicitly with hybridity, it is helpful to remember that "integral" could be considered a keyword for many hybrid persons because it embodies the quest for wholeness in a hybrid identity that could very easily dissolve into fragmentation and an incoherent multiplicity.¹²

I would like to start my hybrid critical reaction to *LS* then by commending and fully supporting its proposal to consider the ecological question within an "integral" framework. At the heart of an integral approach to ecology is the notion that "everything is closely interrelated" and that the solution to the present ecological crisis lies in "taking into account every aspect of the global crisis" (#137) and how each aspect of the universe is not a completely separate entity but is rather closely interrelated with everything else. This echoes the stated goal in *RLAAH* that hybridity-as-a-hermeneutical-tool attempts to "break down the wall between us and them" and to make people more aware of the "intimate connections between different worlds" with the ultimate goal of realizing more deeply that, in God or the Ultimate, "all things inter-are or inter-exist."¹³

With the pope, hybridity (as a lens) would affirm that situating theological thinking about ecology in an integral framework is definitely the right first step to take. Having established that principle, *LS* delves into concrete areas which make clear why ecology is indeed an integral affair. The basic reason of course is that it involves striving for balanced and just relationships between many diverse and different entities, just as—let me explicitly point out—in an integrated hybrid identity. Among these many different sub-areas, the pope highlights the following: (i) the relationship between living organisms and the environment (#138 and ff.); (ii) cultural ecology

(#143 and ff.); (iii) the ecology of daily life (characterized by a remarkable emphasis on social justice) (#147 and ff.); (iv) the principle of the common good (#156 and ff.); and (v) justice between the generations (#159 and ff.).

Indeed, if we claim that the term “ecology” fundamentally signifies “the relationship between organisms and their environment,”¹⁴ *an integral ecology* (as urged by LS) might be qualified as a process of seeking a balanced, harmonious, and just (characterized by distributive justice) relationship between organisms and their environment.

THE HUMAN AND (EVEN) CHRISTIAN ORIGIN OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Of course, the next logical question to pose by us who are living in the midst of an ecological crisis is: What is the cause of the disruption of the once originally balanced, harmonious, and just relationship between organisms and their environment? LS unequivocally says in chapter 2 that the cause of this “disruption of harmony” leading to the present ecological crisis *is human in origin*. To put it more starkly, humans have and continue to cause the ecological crisis.

To frame that in terms of integrality, we can say that human beings themselves have lost sight of the integral harmony and balance of the cosmos because they have given undue priority to the technocratic paradigm at the expense of all others.¹⁵ Not only have they dominantly viewed the world through a technocratic paradigm but they have also acted upon such a worldview to utilize technology for the purpose of dominating and exploiting not only the environment but also all other “weaker” beings (e.g., animals and other humans) for the advantage of the technologically superior. This, according to LS, is what disrupts the wholesome integrality of the relationship between organisms and their environment: the distorted worldviews (and their implementation) on the part of humans who see the world as a place to dominate and subjugate for their own advantage without due consideration of the need to maintain a wholesome and integral balance between the different entities that exist therein.

THE PROBLEM OF ANTHROPOCENTRICISM

As if that weren't enough, LS goes on to say explicitly that what lies at the root of the alarming ecological disaster that faces the world today is what it calls “modern anthropocentrism” that “sees nature . . . [merely] as raw material to be hammered into useful shape” (LS #115). LS then suggests that, instead of an unbridled paradigm of human mastery over the world of nature, a paradigm that understands humans as having to exercise “responsible stewardship” over nature should be preferred (LS #116).

In LS #67, Pope Francis rightly deals with the notion expressed in Genesis 1:28 that human beings were created to “subdue” the earth and to have “dominion” over every other living being. He admits that this injunction could be misunderstood and exploited. That is why he suggests that the commands that appear in Gen. 1:28 should be reconsidered to mean that humans should use the earth responsibly and maintain the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature (LS #66).

IS ANTHROPOCENTRISM A “MODERN” PROBLEM?

Many studies have suggested that the Christian worldview embedded in the biblical writings is a major cause of our contemporary ecological crisis. The historian of science Lynn White, for example, argued that Christian thought posits a sort of dualistic ethical system that, for all practical purposes, sharply discriminates between humans and nature. Hence, in such a worldview, humans are specially privileged beings that are, ultimately speaking, separate from rather than part of the natural community. He soberly concludes: “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.”¹⁶

For this hybrid interlocutor, this point from White resonates deeply because the aim of a holistic hybridity is, as stated previously, to break down the barrier between “us” and “them” (applied to this case, *even when “them” means “nature”*). In this case, it appears that, in many ways throughout history, the Christian worldview has indeed driven a wedge between humans and nature by proclaiming and emphasizing the unique status of humans because they have been created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). Of course, the teaching and notion of *Imago Dei* is one of the most important and cherished in the Christian tradition. Repudiating it might even be tantamount to a major undermining of the whole tradition. Hence, the standard move, as evidenced also in LS, is to argue that the injunction in Gen 1:28 (to subdue and dominate the earth) means that humans, as *responsible stewards of God’s creation*, should treat fellow humans as well as all other living and nonliving beings with care and responsibility (LS, #66–69).

A BRIEF EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF GEN 1:28

A close exegetical reading of Gen 1:28 reveals some intriguing things. The verb 𐤓𐤁𐤁 (rā-dāḏ) that is usually translated into English as “to subdue” has the connotation of “to beat down,” that is, conquer another and, by implication, oppress them (as seen, e.g., in its usages in Ps 144:2; Isa 45:1).¹⁷ Illuminating is Richard Clifford and Roland Murphy’s commentary on Gen 1:26–28 where they say,

Subdue the earth: The nuance of the verb is “to master,” “to bring forcefully under control.” Force is necessary at the beginning to make the untamed land serve humans. Humans nonetheless are to respect the environment; they are not to kill for food but are to treat all life with respect. As the rest of v 28 shows, humans are the pinnacle of the created world; the world is made for man and woman. The imperatives in v 28 are a biblical way of defining essence, like the imperatives in Exod 20:2-17; Lev 19:2; Deut 16:18-20, etc.¹⁸

It seems then that the designation of humans as *Imago Dei* is indeed a claim for a privileged status that, in effect, distinguishes humans from the rest of creation. It carries with it the responsibility of having to “subdue” (*if necessary, by force*) and “dominate” all lesser entities.

The first thing that comes to mind upon reviewing this exegetical data is that anthropocentrism as the root of the ecological crisis, *unlike what LS seems to suggest*,

is not merely a “modern” problem. It has existed in the Christian worldview all the way from its inception, as the Genesis account suggests.

Yes, the injunction to be a “responsible steward” of creation is, without doubt, helpful and necessary. However, through the lens of hybridity, this hybrid interlocutor cannot shake the feeling that, at least in this regard, standard Christian theological thinking and language seem to hit a brick wall pointing to a crucial shortcoming and limitation in its capability to deal with the ecological crisis. The burning question that arises at this point then is: Can standard Christian theology really overcome the binarity or duality that it seems to posit between humans and nature? If not, might this fundamental duality or binarity be a continuing major factor that contributes to the ecological crisis?

THE NEED TO LOOK FOR NONDUAL, MORE UNITIVE PARADIGMS

It would seem that a more helpful paradigm to promote an ecological approach (one that moves beyond mere lip-service into a more profound, even—I shall suggest in the context of this study—“hybrid” ecological awareness) might perhaps be one characterized by a nondual (nonbinary), unitive thinking, and language. By that I mean a worldview that ultimately posits a *more fundamental and radical unity* among all the entities in the universe than standard Christian theological language which, at the end of the day, is still based on Genesis’ *Imago Dei* concept. Hence, we are on a quest for a framework that envisages the apparent plurality in the universe as a mere illusion that hides the fact that everything is actually part of—what we may call—“the One”; a paradigm that is decidedly nondual and that seeks to bridge apparent opposites into a paradoxical unity.

Of course, this suggestion stems from the hybridity present in this interlocutor; it is rooted in the intentional hybrid lenses that are being used here to view the ecological crisis. This might be an illustration of how hybridity as a hermeneutical lens can shed light on aspects that otherwise may not be immediately apparent.

Bringing this discussion to a more concrete level, yet still staying within the Christian theological tradition, we note that there are various possible theological strands of thought or paradigms that could well fit into the nondual, more unitive category suggested above. Among many others, one could name, for example, the British philosopher–theologian John Hick, who in his various works has posited a “Divine Reality” at the heart of all religions.¹⁹ Another voice to be seriously considered is Raimon Panikkar and his notion of the “fundamental religious fact” developed in various writings.²⁰ Hick and Panikkar are Christian thinkers who have suggested in various ways that Christianity could actually be more radically open to the positive and even necessary value and role that other religions play in the one divine economy.

However, the big interrogative is the fact that such avant-garde Christian theological thinkers such as Hick and Panikkar are still considered by and large in Christianity as—for want of a better expression—“nonstandard.” In short, although they argue that Christianity could itself be radically nondual and more unitive, their ideas have yet to gain more approval to be accepted as “standard” Christianity.

Standard or mainline Christianity, as evidenced, for example, in LS, still upholds the traditional teaching that humans created in God's image are the pinnacle of God's creation and thus should be regarded somehow as "special" and "set apart" from everything else. This seems to be a nonnegotiable element at the moment.

THE NONDUAL, UNITIVE PARADIGM IN BUDDHISM

With this, we can shift to the other side of this hybrid interlocutor's hybrid identity which could prove useful in proposing possible solutions to this impasse and could be more potentially helpful in the theological conversation about ecology.

Allow me to digress a little into some autobiographical details to explain where I am coming from on this issue. Although I was raised in the (staunchly Catholic) Philippines, I moved to my father's country, Japan, and lived there for a while in my 20s and 30s. Since that time, Buddhism (particularly, the Mahayana and Zen strands of it) has become the other dominant religious influence in my life, in addition, of course, to my original Catholic Christian background. Through the years and particularly as I entered middle age, I found myself treasuring more this Buddhist influence that I was exposed to in Japan. I started to cultivate it actively and even began to think of myself as Buddhist in some way. Why? Because I found time and again, that non-monotheistic, non-western Buddhism serves as a good complement to the monotheistic, westernized Christianity that I imbibed since my infancy. I consider these two religious heritages then a good sort of *yin and yang* for me to have a more wholesome religiosity and spirituality than if I were just to remain strictly a mono-religious adherent. This is part of my personal, complex religious hybridity.²¹ And this of course is echoed in the experiences of many others.²²

As I confront a possible limitation in Christian thinking and language with regard to the ecological crisis, my hybrid religious-spiritual identity and thoughts turn to my other heritage, Buddhism, to try to see whether it could be of any assistance in this matter.

When I do so, the first thing that strikes me is that "standard" Buddhism (again further qualified here in its Mahayana, Zen strands) is arguably more amenable to claiming that human beings need not be, (better even) *should not be* considered as the pinnacle of creation-reality because humans (particularly, as individualized bodies) are considered as—to use standard Buddhist language—mere "forms" that have arisen, given the presence of the right conditions for their arising.²³ However, like everything else, even human beings eventually cease as "forms" and go back to the all-encompassing and fertile "Emptiness" that is the heart of all reality. Of course, this is not the place to elaborate on this Buddhist teaching but, to (very simplistically) summarize a major teaching of Buddhism on this, *The Heart Sutra* says, "The nature of form is empty; emptiness is form. Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. That which is form is empty, that which is emptiness is form . . ." ²⁴

In short, Buddhism in general seems to be more amenable to a more detached attitude about the human being's place in nature, in creation, in the cosmos. It seems to be noncommittal, even strongly against the idea of claiming the supremacy of

humanity above everything else, something that the mainline Christian tradition for most of its history has been heavily invested in. I think, therefore, that Buddhist-inspired thinking is a more helpful framework to propose concrete solutions to the ecological crisis that we face because when we detach ourselves more from the idea that humans have a priority, even a supremacy in the big equation of reality, then we could perhaps be more aware of the ecological tragedy that looms over us all, caused after all in a major way by a sort of “tunnel vision” that focuses on human beings over and above everything else.

THICH NHAT HANH’S “INTERBEING”

And with that, this is a good moment to bring into relief one of the pillars of the thinking of (the very recently passed on to eternal peace) Thich Nhat Hanh or “Thay” (“teacher,” “sensei” as he is known by his students)²⁵ and apply it intentionally to the topic we are discussing here.

“Interbeing” is without doubt one of the foundations of Thay’s iteration of the Dharma, and it is arguably the way by which he explains the fundamental Buddhist concept of Emptiness or *Sunyata*. Thus he can aver,

Emptiness always means empty of something . . . *We are empty of a separate, independent self.* We cannot be by ourselves alone. *We can only inter-be with everything else in the cosmos.* The practice is to nourish the insight into emptiness all day long. Wherever we go, we touch the nature of emptiness in everything we contact. We look deeply at the table, the blue sky, our friend, the mountain, the river, our anger, and our happiness and see that these are *all empty of a separate self.* When we touch these things deeply, *we see the interbeing and interpenetrating nature of all that is.* Emptiness does not mean nonexistence. It means Interdependent Co-Arising, impermanence, and nonself.²⁶

In sum, Thay teaches us in his particular way the Buddhist foundational principle that the idea that there is a separate and independent “I” is false. That “separate and independent I (or ego)” is actually empty, nonexistent. What is true; what is the reality rather is that everyone and everything exist in a mode Thay usually refers to as “interbeing.” In other words, reality is interrelational.

If I can express that now in terms of hybridity: Reality can be considered as a kind of “mega-hybridity.” What is usually considered different and independent “worlds” are actually part of that grand hybridous mix that comprises reality. But we can only realize that if we look deeply enough into the true nature of reality through—Thay would certainly add—the practice of Mindfulness.

It is necessary to review here how Thay applies the teaching of interbeing specifically to nature and to ecology because therein lies the paradigm that could help and even add a critical solution to the apparent impasse that Christian theology with its claim of “humans over nature” inevitably results in. I should add that I consider Thay’s thinking on ecology an expression of hybridity as applied to the relationship of humans and nature.

In his 2021 book *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*, Thay invites his readers from the very beginning of the work to wake up to the following realization about our fragile earth-home.

When you wake up and you see that the Earth is not just the environment, the Earth *is* us, you can touch the nature of interbeing. And at that moment you can have real communication with the Earth. That is the highest form of prayer. In that kind of relationship, you will have the love, strength, and awakening you need to change your life.²⁷

He claims that when this ecological enlightenment happens, humans can transcend an anthropocentric view of reality: “. . . when you have this right view . . . you transcend the dualistic way of seeing things: the idea that the Earth is only the environment, and that you are in the center; and that you only want to do something for the Earth so *you* can survive.”²⁸

In Thay’s teaching on “deep ecology,” he actually proposes in line with the Diamond Sutra, to “throw away the notion of ‘human being’.”²⁹ This teaching of course is a consequence of interbeing for what appears as a human being is actually made up also of nonhuman elements. That could be further extended to include the notion that “living,” “sentient” beings, when seen through the notion of interbeing, include in themselves “nonliving,” “non-sentient” beings as well. Hence, Thay’s style of deep ecology consists in *blurring* the differences and divisions between all these categories and seeing instead everything and everyone as being inter-existent, as all being part of the One, the fertile, pregnant Emptiness. This is a nonbinary, nondual, unitive way of seeing reality that—I suggest strongly—could be more helpful for us as we face the ecological crisis and try to save the planet. The long and short of it is—again to echo Thay—looking deeply at and truly realizing that “the human race is part of nature.”³⁰ The grim alternative to that is unfortunately the one humans have been engaged in for a long time, the way by which they try to “dominate the earth.” Thay’s verdict on that is curt and urgent, “If we try to dominate or oppress nature, it rebels.”³¹

HYBRIDITY’S RESISTANCE TO CLAIMS OF “SUPERIORITY”

We mentioned “interstitial integrity” above and described it as the hybrid person’s effort to achieve a measure of balance between and among the different “worlds” in which they are located, or which coexist (Thay’s “inter-are”) within them. This underscores the fact that hybrids engaged in this quest for balance have little patience for positions which claim the superiority of a particular world over another because experience and reflection have taught them that a claim of superiority is often merely an expression of imbalanced power relations between the different “worlds” that exist within themselves. The truth, for them, lies closer to the notion that there is no culture or even religious tradition superior to others but that different cultural worlds and faith traditions are just diverse, yet valid ways of being human and spiritual.³²

If we apply this hybrid “resistance to claims of superiority” to the issue of ecology, we can see that the reason why a hybrid paradigm might find the Gen 1:28 injunction to subdue the earth (and the whole Christian teaching on humans having a special status) problematic is because it does seem to be such a claim of superiority. Now, since this hybrid interlocutor is also a Christian, he is paradoxically loath to do away completely with this special human status as *Imago Dei*. However, when we consider the causes of the ecological crisis we have analyzed above, it does seem that Buddhism with its thinking on Emptiness and Nonduality (particularly, the teaching that Thich Nhat Hanh regularly expresses as “Interbeing”) might perhaps be the more helpful paradigm to deal with the (originally Christian) anthropocentrism that lies at the root of many ecological problems. Buddhism and aspects of the Dharma about *Sunyata* or Emptiness do seem to be a more effective suggestion on how we can realize hybridity’s goal of overcoming and transcending the radical divide between “us” and “them” (with “them” in this case being “Nature”).³³

In conclusion, the vital role in this globalized world that hybridity-as-an-interpretive lens could play, as I have tried to show here, is that it can suggest ways by which we can (even religiously or theologically) transcend the typical binary division we usually make of the world into “us” and “them” (with “us” often identified as the “good guys” and “them” the villains) and, thus, further promote compassion, peace, harmony, respect, and justice among entities which could be very different from one another.³⁴

The goal of hybridity (as a hermeneutical tool) is to build a world in which the thick wall between “us” and “them” can be hammered and broken down in favor of a new worldview, a new paradigm in which the intimate connections among different worlds are highlighted and in which the presence of what we typically consider “other” is increasingly found within our very own selves. In short, hybridity as a conceptual tool in religious studies and theology actively seeks to disrupt and complexify religious and theological simplifications and demarcations,³⁵ and show that, ultimately, in God (or in whatever name one prefers to call the Ultimate), we all—to use Thay’s expression once again—“inter-are.”³⁶ In other words, in the greater scheme of things, we are all interconnected. Let me repeat: We are all becoming more and more hybridized every day in our contemporary world. If we embrace this hybridity wholeheartedly and try to view reality through it, it becomes very clear that the idea of a self that is completely distinct from others, as well as the idea that nature is separate from the human, is actually a dangerous illusion, the root cause of the ecological crisis to be sure, but also of all our strife. It is way past time to move beyond it.

NOTES

1. Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 8–23.
2. Ruben Habito, *Healing Breath: Zen for Christians and Buddhists in a Wounded World* (Boston: Living World, 2006).

3. Julius-Kei Kato, *Religious Language and Asian (North) American Hybridity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Henceforward to be referred to as RLAAH. Other significant works for reference on hybridity are the following. A succinct introduction (142 pages in small book format) to cultural hybridity is Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010). Other more technical studies: Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Keri E. Iyall Smith and Patricia Leavy (eds.), *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

4. Consult also the even more extensive elaboration on hybridity as a hermeneutical tool in Julius-Kei Kato, *How Immigrant Christians Living in Mixed Cultures Interpret Their Religion: Asian-American Diasporic Hybridity and Its Implications for Hermeneutics* (Lewiston, NY: EdwinMellen Press, 2012), 20–44.

5. RLAAH, 11.

6. Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 43–48.

7. RLAAH, 12.

8. This is one of the main arguments that is made in Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture*.

9. Rita Nakashima Brock, “Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman’s Theology,” in *Introduction to Christian Theology*, ed. Roger A. Badham (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 183–196.

10. As in RLAAH. I do this of course with the obvious presupposition that the hybrid interlocutor is myself. Nevertheless, I hope that my own interpretations and reflections would resonate with many others in a similar situation and context.

11. Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home* (Vatican, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed July 17, 2022.

12. See, for example, Virgilio Elizondo, “*Mestizaje* as a Locus of Theological Reflection,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology*, ed. Arturo Bañuelas, *Mestizo Christianity Theology from the Latino Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 12.

13. RLAAH, 4.

14. *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (2016), s.v. “ecology,” retrieved from <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/ecology>, accessed February 19, 2022.

15. LS, ch. 3, parts I and II.

16. Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1205.

17. James A. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), #8096.

18. Richard J. Clifford, SJ, Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., “Genesis,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 9.

19. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 210–230; John Hick, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990).

20. Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist 1978), 2–23, among others. See also Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), part 3.

21. RLAAH, 12–13.

22. See, for example, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *Many Mansions: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002). Also Gideon Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).

23. See, for example, Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 176, 225–227.

24. This teaching can be found in practically any standard account of basic Buddhist dharma, such as a popular iteration of it found for instance in Jack Kornfield (ed.), *The Teachings of the Buddha* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993), 133. This just goes on to show that this is arguably as standard a Buddhist teaching as one can be.

25. I will follow this convention of calling Thich Nhat Hanh “Thay” as I do consider myself his student as well.

26. Emphases added. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, 146.

27. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* (New York: HarperOne, 2021),

2. Emphases in the original.

28. *Ibid.*, 3.

29. *Ibid.*, 22.

30. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology* (Berkeley: Parallax, 2008), 36.

31. *Ibid.*

32. RLAAH, 22.

33. *Ibid.*, 4.

34. *Ibid.*, 3.

35. *Ibid.*, 4.

36. This expression is found in one way or another in practically all of Thich Nhat Hanh's many works. A good excerpt is found in Robert Ellsberg (ed.), *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*, with an introduction by Sister Annabel Laity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 54–56.