St. Stephen's College

Ecology and Human Flourishing: Theological Insights from an Urban Community Garden in Western Canada

by

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Abstract

This three-part dissertation addresses the perceived indifference of a large segment of the Christian community to the ecological crisis of our time and suggests how they can experience heartfelt love and commitment toward God's creation. It is premised on the belief of the American poet and farmer Wendell Berry that commitment to God's creation, especially as represented by the land, is a matter of the heart. To this end, the first part of the dissertation explores the foundations eco-theologians have laid by applying theoretical, exegetical, and scientific data to establish the theological significance of God's creation. The second part is a series of idiographic studies that used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to study a group of gardeners in Western Canada who reported on the significance of interacting with nature and people in a community garden. Their experiences, which varied according to the needs and challenges that brought them to the garden, indicated three outcomes of reflective gardening: the finding of community, the experience of growth as needed, and the realization of meaning. With no pretensions of universalizing the lived experience of the gardeners, the third part draws from the idiographic studies to gain insights into how community gardening can train the minds of the Christian faithful to love God's creation through association, concluding with theological reflections on the significance of the ecological environment for our well-being and our Christian vision of the present life.

Key words: creation, ecology, community, gardening, wellbeing

To my loving parents,
Joseph Olagboye Olabimtan (1923-2006)
and
Juliana Ebun Olabimtan, Nee Aworele (1930-2007)

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Introduction: A Statement of the Problem

At the heart of the present ecological crisis is the aggressive human exploitation of the ecological environment. From the beginning of the modern era in the 16th century, we humans have gradually alienated ourselves from the world of nature, reckoning it as a mere resource bank for our consumption. The result has been an irreverent attitude towards the unbridled exploitation of the natural environment. In the face of the present crisis, it is evident there is a rift between us humans and the world of nature, or creation as we Christians call it. Now that the significance of the crisis has dawned on people and organizations, we are gradually exploring how we can redeem the situation.

Christian communities are among those who have been trying to address the crisis, however, by re-interpreting scripture, revisiting tradition, and using scientific discoveries. A few church traditions in North America and Europe have also been making concerted efforts to promote ecological values of recycling waste and reducing carbon footprints among worshippers.[1] Yet, activities in this direction have been mainly at the

[1] See, for example, European Christian Environmental Network, https://www.ecen.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/ECEN%20Assembly%202021_session%204_Henry%20Uniacke_slides.pdf; The Presbyterian Church in Canada, https://presbyterian.ca/church-building-resources/; Presbyterians for Earth Care, https://presbyearthcare.org/green-building-and-energy-efficiency/; Lutherans Restoring Creation, https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/. The Britannica defines carbon footprint as the "amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions associated with all the activities of a person or other entity (e.g., building, corporation, country, etc.). It includes direct emissions, such as those that result from fossil-fuel combustion in manufacturing, heating, and transportation, as well as emissions required to produce the electricity associated with goods and services consumed. In addition, the carbon footprint concept also often includes the emissions of other greenhouse gases, such as methane, nitrous oxide, or chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)." See: Britannica, "Carbon Footprint: Ecology and Conservation," https://www.britannica.com/science/carbon-footprint.

institutional level of local churches and denominations. The masses of the faithful do not seem to be paying attention to this new orientation.

The intellectual approach has been used through the centuries in the spiritual formation of Christian people. However, the message of ecological sensibility the Church is now proclaiming still leaves many people unmoved. Their disconnection from creation continues. As Christian farmer and poet Wendell Berry says, "it all hinges on affection," meaning, the change we desire must come from deep within our hearts.[2] So, how does one instill this love for a piece of land and nature, practically, so that people sense their intrinsic connectedness to God's creation?

The experience of a group of individuals in an urban community gardening setting, as promoted by human service agencies, can give us essential insights into the various aspects of "healing" our rift from creation. It also points to the role that Christian communities can play in reconnecting people to creation by providing avenues for deep interaction with nature as through urban community gardening.

Therapolis,[3] an urban community garden founded on Christian values in Western Canada, is one example of how Christian communities can provide individuals with ways of reconnecting with and developing "affection" for creation and thus experience healing on many personal levels: bodily, socially, and spiritually. As an idiographic study, the experiences of the gardeners, individually or collectively, are not held up to formulate a theory of community gardening; rather, they are being explored to unveil the potential

[2] Wendell Berry, *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012) 11-14.

[3] All the names of persons and organizations mentioned in this study are pseudonyms meant to protect their identities.

value of the ecological environment beyond the commodity mindset of modern society and thereby promote a more responsible attitude toward it among Christians.

Therefore, my foundational research concern is how the lived experience of the gardeners at Therapolis can practically inform emerging Christian eco-theology, unveil to Christian communities the intrinsic value of creation beyond the commodities we extract from it and thereby inspire their ecological affection. As research in ministry, I am interested in the intersection of urban community gardening and eco-theology with an eye on how the former can illuminate the latter and make it a real-life experience for Christians. I envisage that such eco-theology grounded in human experience can generate in Christian communities affection for God's creation and evoke ecological sensibilities in individuals. To this end, I will be focusing on three aspects.

My first object of attention is the emergence of the field of Christian eco-theology, my journey into the field, its relevant literature, and the need to ground its formulations in lived experience. Second, I will undertake idiographic studies of people involved in urban gardening, using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA), providing a literature review of urban gardening, and indicating what has not yet been studied. Third, I will then look at how the idiographic studies help us to understand how urban gardening can reconnect people in a deep way to the ecological environment, and how it assists us to gain a new understanding of the theology of the environment.

Part I: The Emergence of Christian Eco-theology and Its Limits

Chapter 1

Christian Eco-theology: Its Emergence and My Personal Journey

1.1 The Emergence

Placed in the global context of the emergence of human religious consciousness, Christianity inherited several theological concepts from primal religions of the ancient world, but it did so with critical awareness and conscious reformulation. These concepts include salvation, atonement, judgement, and moral purity. It also inherited various traditions of religious incorporation and participation, such as baptism and ritual meals. While critically appropriating these concepts and practices, Christianity, beginning from its Hebraic roots, maintained a polemical stance against the ancient, primal religions of the Near East. This approach often continued in the successive expansion of Christianity into the primal societies of the world even if, at times, Christian mission agents appropriated indigenous religious sensibilities to establish the faith of the Church in new climes. The point of contention was and remains, in the modern world, the sacralising value indigenous religions ascribe to the world of nature.

From the instant Israel was established as a nation, the values enshrined in the nation's constitution set the people at odds with the religious practices of neighbouring peoples. In the years following their settling in Palestine, the permissive rituals of the indigenous people became a source of temptation and consequently drew the ire of the Hebrew prophets. They denounced the culture of nature worship. Fundamentalist Christianity of the early twentieth century inherited this wholesale condemnation of primal religious practices. In the process, even the hopeful and respectful provisions in

the Hebrew and Christian writings on creation did not receive their requisite theological attention. Rather, Enlightenment Christianity and its heavenly-focused spirituality, which western missions took to the South, privileged humanity and condemned indigenous spirituality. In doing so, they lost sight of the incipient ecological vision of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which the monastic movement of the Benedictines assiduously actioned in their missionary enterprise from the sixth century onward. Rodrick Nash notes that these busy monks "drained swamps, cleared forests, improved fields, and tended their gardens with diligence and devotion".[1]

As the medieval age was giving way to European Enlightenment, the two champions of the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin, addressed the doctrine of God in relation to nature. It is significant that they did so, not in the anthropocentric spirit of our time but in appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature itself. They saw value in contemplating the wonders of the universe. Martin Luther saw the entire creation as a sacrament of divine presence in the universe, an affirmation of the budding concept of panentheism. His contemporary, Calvin, admonished that when we contemplate nature, "we should not merely run them over cursorily, and, so to speak, with the fleeting glance, but we should ponder them at length, turn them over in our mind seriously and faithfully, and recollect them repeatedly".[2] Indeed, their medieval predecessor, Francis of Assisi, had practically engaged in such contemplation himself.

[1] Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 96.

[2] H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 128-29.

In a systematic reversal, the secularisation of society and the absentminded capitulation of Christian theology to the scientific worldview ensured a Christian theological indifference to the world of nature in the 20th century.[3] Among Protestant Christians, religious fundamentalism that was already indifferent to the transcendent value of the present life found reinforcement in the utilitarian, materialist worldview of the sciences. It is a paradox that secular critics of Christian communities' apparent indifference to the world of nature[4] and the rapprochement of the scientific community[5] jumpstarted the present Christian awareness of the theological significance of the ecological environment and brought to relevance earlier lone theological voices like Walter Lowdermilk, Joseph Sittler, and Richard Baer.[6]

Presently, perspectives remain diverse within emerging Christian eco-theologies as they have been on many doctrinal issues Christian communities have argued about through history. Nevertheless, discernible outlines and contours are emerging. These will be discussed following a narrative of my own journey into the field.

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[3] Romano Guardini, *Letters from Lake Como: Explorations in Technology and the Human Race*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994).

[4] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767: 1203-07.

[5] National Religious Partnership for the Environment, "The Joint Appeal in Religion and Science: Statement by Religious Leaders at the Summit on Environment," June 3, 1991, https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Joint%20Appeal.pdf.

[6] Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 98-104; Bron Taylor, "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no 3(2016): 285-86. DOI: 10.1558/jsrnc.v10i3.29010.

1.2 My Personal Journey

My entry into the field of eco-theology has been a little circuitous and context informed. The three spheres of my formation—culture, religion, and formal education—have shaped my perspective in the emerging field. Coming from among the Yoruba people of West Africa, my cultural orientation is grounded in the primal worldview which, broadly speaking, informs the overarching ontology of indigenous peoples. Its essential feature is the unity of reality. In this, primal societies recognize the interdependence of all that exists, such that there is no dichotomy between the secular and the sacred or between the visible and the invisible. Everything interpenetrates as one entangled reality.[7] Hence, in primal societies, all ecologies—moral, biotic, and social—belong together and share a common destiny.

Although I was raised in the Yoruba cultural milieu, my formation did not take place there exclusively. Being born and nurtured in the city compromised my indigeneity. My education in the tradition of western modernity also exerted its influence so that, culturally, I emerged as a hybrid of my ancestral past and the expanding worldwide cosmopolitan culture. Enlightenment education, up to the

[7] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 3; Elizabeth Allison, "Spirits and Nature: The Intertwining of Sacred Cosmologies and Environmental Conservation in Bhutan." *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2017): 197–226; Matthew McDermott, "Our Sacred Earth: Hinduism and the Environment. *Hinduism Today* (April-June 2011), https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5161; Fikret Berkes, Mina Kislalioglu, Carl Folke and Madhav Gadgil, "Exploring the Basic Ecological Unit: Ecosystem-like Concepts in Traditional Societies. *Ecosystems* 1, no. 5 (September-October 1998): 409–15.

university level, thus had its attrition effects on my Yoruba identity, something I did not appreciate until I entered graduate school. Mine is not an unusual case. Yoruba's fascination with European enlightenment, *olaju*, through western education systematically eroded in my generation our value for indigenous tradition in post-colonial West Africa, including indigenous ecological sensibilities. The modernizing forces of colonialism have reshaped our society irreversibly.

My faith leaning is evangelical Christianity but with a generous openness to ecumenical thoughts and practices. Evangelicalism is a broad tradition that cuts across different protestant church traditions and emphasizes lived Christian experience rather than mere intellectual assent to doctrines. It also ranges across a wide spectrum of doctrinal fundamentalism at one end and shades of charismatic and Pentecostal tendencies at the other. Across the spectrum, and in varying degrees, depending on cultural milieus, contemporary evangelical Christianity tends to find expression in an other-worldly emphasis and pursuit, thus discounting the value of the present life. It was not always like this.

European evangelical missionaries brought Christianity to the global South beginning in the eighteenth century. They fought against the trans-Atlantic slave trade; they facilitated literacy and modern medical care as they established schools and hospitals. Their doctors and nurses sought to improve the quality of life of their prospects. Missionary teachers and artisans taught converts valuable skills in various trades. They also interposed in local conflicts, occasionally standing up to

the predatory tendencies of colonial agents. They undertook all these tasks as part of their benevolent mission.[8]

In what became Nigeria, British benevolent missions transformed in the late nineteenth century into domination as a younger and better-educated generation that exclusively focused on the hereafter took over. Their rallying call of the age was "the evangelization of the world in this generation."[9]

European colonialism affected other domains of the lives of the younger churches of the global South. As the benevolent mission gave way to the colonial church and the emphasis on the relevance of culture to the indigenous church receded, the Christian message was narrowed down to the life hereafter. For almost a century, evangelicals emphasized the afterlife and played down the value of the present life.

The first attempt to remedy this skewed message came in the January 1978 Willowbank Consultation on Gospel and Culture, organized by the Lausanne Movement.[10] The outcome of the consultation emphasized the communication of the gospel in cultural contexts. Although it did not specifically address ecological issues, it sensitized the evangelical constituency to the mundane realities in which humans function.

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[8] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1984), 1ff; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[9] John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1901).

[10] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Lausanne Occasional Paper 2: "The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture," 1978, https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-2.

Several frontline evangelical leaders have since published significantly in the theological field, expressing the significance of the Christian message in the social milieu of human temporal existence. Among the significant works in this respect are John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1984),[11] Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1997),[12] Max Stackhouse's edited four-volume *God and Globalization* series (2000-2009),[13] and Bryant Myers' *Walking with the Poor* (1999).[14] These and other works demonstrated a significant shift in evangelical thinking on the value of temporal life and informed my early theological perspective. Nonetheless, very few of them touched upon the emerging debates regarding the global ecological crisis. Other than Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970),[15] which was a response to the unsparing critique of Western Christianity by Lynn White jr., and the work of John Stott, direct ecological concerns were left unaddressed in their theology until the closing decade of the twentieth century.

Regardless, the gradual broadening of evangelical thought on humanity and the present life essentially remains a Western development. In much of the global South, especially in Africa, the masses of evangelical Christian communities

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[11] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1984).

[12] Ron J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

[13] The four volumes of *God and Globalization* include *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, volume I (2000); *The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, volume II (2001); *Christ and the Dominions of Civilization* (2001); and *Globalization and Grace*, volume IV (2009).

[14] Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis 2011).

[15] Francis Shaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970).

remain untouched by the thinking of the Lausanne movement, which is confined to a circle of academic elites and institutions. The eddies of the emerging ecological awareness and practices found presently among the evangelical churches of Africa are driven by their western mission partners.[16]

Religiously, most African Christian faithful are still heavenly-focused while seeking a good and prosperous life in the present. The idea of global ecological crises is not yet a concern among us as the quest for daily survival under repressive regimes and predatory ruling elites is more urgent. It appears the negative perception of the ecological environment among southern Christians, persistently in a polemical stance against the value indigenous religions attach to it, will remain a major obstacle to the necessary awakening to ecological responsibility among us.

My privilege of being tutored at the graduate level by liberal members of the Evangelical movement and consequent exposure to the ways African Initiated Churches (AIC) intuitively appropriated indigenous worldview into their local theologies gradually gave me the enlightenment that has shaped my theological perspective on faith vis-à-vis the temporal realities of human existence. However, this theological formation is but an aspect of my intellectual formation. The foundations for my ecological awareness were laid remotely by my training in the

[16] *A Rocha*, a Portuguese-founded, evangelical Christian movement promoting ecological practices globally, is a western mission agency actively promoting environmental awareness and practices in the global South. See https://arocha.org/en/. Field experience drew Serving in Mission (SIM), formerly known as Sudan Interior Mission, into social transformation as seen in their partnership with the Evangelical Church Winning All (formerly Evangelical Church of West Africa) in northern Nigeria and Niger Republic among Hausa-speaking people. See Barbara M. Cooper, *Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

natural sciences, up to the first year of my baccalaureate program, and by subsequent training in the built environment.

My conversion to an ecologically sensitive Christianity eventually occurred at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture in Ghana. There, theological learning gave me the tool for learning African culture through the study of Christianity in Africa. In my emerging intellectual reorientation, Professor Howell taught me, in 2011, to take my first steps in learning about the theology of the environment, first at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, USA, and later in Ghana as a co-facilitator with her in the course "Theology and Mission – Holistic Mission and Development Option". This tutelage gave me my early insights into the relationship between culture and ecology and imbued meaning into my long and tortuous religious, cultural, and academic itineraries.

In hindsight, my increasing awareness of ecologically informed Christianity brought into sharp relief my understanding of the social instability that plagued my West African region in the closing decades of the 20th century. Through this awareness, I entered the field of eco-theology from the background of a society corrupted by the unbridled commodification of nature and its resources, not just by dominant corporations but also by local men and women of political influence.

For forty years, beginning from the 1980s, West Africa witnessed wars and political instabilities arising from the extraction of environmental resources. The political instability that resulted in wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia and the perennial low-intensity warfare that raged in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, my

country, were products of the same dynamic of the commodification of nature's resources. The extractive industry, a legacy of colonialism, and the economic mainstay of many modern African nation-states, disrupted the temperance at the heart of precolonial societies' human-environment interaction and left in its trail festering poverty, pollution, despair, and wars of attrition.[17]

Moving to Western Canada, I saw another dimension of the same human attitude toward the ecological environment. If the result in my primary context was perennial social violence and conflict, the evident result I observed in Western Canada is the material indigence of people left behind by an economic system that thrives on the consumption of ecological resources. That system is the modernist economic paradigm that reduces everything in the natural environment to commodities, including human beings whose values are measured by their economic productivity. Bruce Alexander calls this paradigm a "free market economy".[18]

According to Alexander, for this free market to be free, it requires the uprooting of the structures and patterns of premodern society like "the psychosocial integration [of] clan loyalties, village responsibilities, guild or union rights, charity, family obligations, social roles, or religious values".[19] He further argues that the dislocation caused by this free and rampaging economic philosophy is at the roots of the various forms of addiction

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[17] Writing from the context of South Africa, Klaus Nurnberger has developed the connection between human exploitation of the environment and the ecological crises that tend to follow. See: *Prosperity, Poverty and Pollution. Managing the Approaching Crisis* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

[18] Bruce K. Alexander, *The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society* (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2001), 1. http://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC_Office_Pubs/roots_addiction.pdf.

[19] Alexander.

presently plaguing humans in modern society. This damaging philosophy finds expression in the aftereffects of the forced conversion of the indigenous peoples of Canada to a modern lifestyle through the residential school system. The resultant generational trauma is evident in the various forms of addiction plaguing some Canadian urban youths, from which flow the maladies afflicting underserved people here, including homelessness.

Homelessness and the social ills that attend it in Western Canada are contrasted to the outcome of my own cultural encounter with colonialism. In this, I can appreciate the comparatively ambivalent encounter of my traditional culture with European modernity, which made it possible for us in West Africa to shape our future after colonization.[20] The lack of such an opportunity for the indigenous peoples of North America separates my experience of modernity from theirs. Although I come from a tradition that shares the primal worldview with them, and we are all presently subject to the coercive forces of the "free market" economy called global trade, our historical encounters with European modernity differ.

I encountered some of these underserved citizens in my work with human service agencies that assist them. Apart from the hardnosed operational ethos of modern

[20] In West Africa, the activities of early Christian missions were benevolent as they came through the anti-slavery movement and the campaign to rout out the trade in human beings through legitimate trade in agricultural produce. Their significant social interventions in a few places were also redemptive to society. Unlike in North America, the later cooptation of missions by colonialists was at best partially successful, but not enough to entrench colonialism as a perpetual order in West Africa. The foundations of freedom and egalitarianism that missions laid, though buffeted by local and colonial forces, remained their legacy and inspired early agitators for political independence in the mid-twentieth century.

businesses, many have been left behind because of the government's changing policies.[21] As some seek balance in the storm of material indigence, physical violence and substance abuse are decimating many. Still, a few are angry with aliens like me who have been swept to their shores by modernity's ambivalent impact in the global South.[22]

Addiction and trauma, it should be acknowledged, are not limited to the colonized peoples of Canada, but an experience also shared by those from among the dominant Caucasian peoples. Just as material indigence and social exclusions do, domestic violence and the trappings of material success have equally exposed many young people across ethnicities to the vagaries of modern society, which is often at odds with the total ecology of the environment—biotic, moral, and social. In fact, modern society is recreating the total ecology of its environment on the ethos of brazen consumption and the subtle social Darwinist philosophy of the survival of the fittest.

My experience and observation in Western Canada demonstrate the inextricable connection between human flourishing and how we see and use the total environment. For a long time, the common attitude was that the environment is something outside us as

[21] Time management is one of the challenges of indigenous peoples worldwide in connecting with the track of modernity for survival. Modernity's linear and punctilious understanding of time has no room for the perceived tardiness inherent to indigenous people's cyclic conception of time. On the other hand, indigenous peoples cannot understand why any group of people should be slaves of time to be ruled by it.

[22] Modernity's impact on southern continents has been ambivalent. On the one hand, it has improved the quality of life through infrastructure development and improvements in healthcare delivery. Sometimes these happen at extreme cost to the environment. On the other hand, our value system is still at odds with the liberal values of modernity, such as egalitarianism and an open society. In Africa, the new elite clings to the opportunistic values of precolonial times, which are antithetical to the flourishing of modern society. The result has been the reversal of whatever gains modernity has brought us, the people, evident in widespread material poverty at home and emigration abroad in the quest for survival. However, international geopolitics also play a significant role in this deadlock.

human beings, hence our use of its resources as mere commodities. With the consequences of this misunderstanding staring us in the face in pollution, poverty, and social violence, it is clear, as Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway argue, we are an integral part of the ecological environment both in its biotic and cultural realities.[23] These are the reasons behind my interest in seeking to understand how human service agencies are drawing from the ecological environment to assist their clients and what insights this may yield for our eco-theological grounding.

[23] Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway, "Ecology and Theology of Nature," *Concilium* 5 (2018): 45.

Chapter 2

Key Theological Themes

As in many religious traditions of the world, Christian theology begins with the story of origin, widely called the creation story. This is not from mere curiosity but because the story of origin is at the heart of the question of meaning. When humans look at the cycles of nature, including human life, and the contradictions involved, they cannot but wonder at its extremes of tantalizing prospects and frustrating disappointments, both vividly expressed in the birthing of new lives and the grim reaping of death. In between the extremes run the great adventures of life, ultimately ending in apparent futility. The efforts to make sense of the ensuing bewilderment make the stories of origin central to our human quest for meaning.

Significantly, the Christian story of origin portrays humans as being in a fundamental relationship with the earth, which is evident in our sharing in its material essence and cycles of renewal. In concurrence with this reality, the earth furnishes our nutriment needs for survival and self-perpetuation from generation to generation. This reality is basic, but it implicitly indicates that humans also share in the life-giving dynamics that make the world of nature a living entity. Could these life-giving dynamics include the sense of transcendence that indigenous peoples perceive in the world of nature? Variant traditions of Christianity would respond to this question differently.

However, if the reported recoveries of those who have meaningfully interacted with nature, as in community gardening, is something to go by, the answer is affirmative.[1]

Irrespective of how different Christian traditions view the world of nature, the history of the development of Christian theology has shown that our understanding of the natural world vis-à-vis our roles in it as human beings cannot be wilfully ignored. It is a perennial issue at the core of Christian theologizing, and it is bound to influence the choices we make daily. In this vein, I am exploring three themes relating to a human understanding and experience of the total environment as they provide lenses through which we may appreciate how urban community gardening intrinsically dovetails into eco-theology in practice.[2] The three themes are nature and creation, ecology, and poverty.

2.1 Nature and Creation

Depending on the context, the two identical concepts of nature and creation are often used interchangeably at their face value to mean two things: to qualify the constituent elements of the universe, animate and inanimate, and to describe the perceived workings and processes in the universe without human intervention. Indigenous societies tend to see these workings as sacrosanct and so tend to respond to them with minimal alterations. They consider it virtuous to uphold the processes for the

[1] Christian traditions that hold a sacramental view of creation believe there is more to the material universe than its materiality; as a reality that conveys divine creativity and presence, it communicates some transcendence. This position upholds the sanctity of all creation.

[2] I use the word "total environment" to indicate the milieu—micro, macro and cosmic—in which all elements that cohabit the planet—including human beings, flora, fauna, inanimate objects, and all temporal and supratemporal beings, real and imagined—interact sustainably. I consider that they are all in active interactions, shaping one another's wellbeing and futures.

overall well-being of all the sentient forms of creation interacting in the universe.[3] This perception is not just about the material perpetuation of the biophysical environment but also in deference to the perceived transcendent aspect of the universe for the moral and spiritual flourishing of all the beings in the ecological environment.[4]

While Christian theism recognizes the divine origin of nature, Christians believe that nature is tainted by the brokenness of humanity. And although they prefer the word "creation" in acknowledgement of a personal divine as the source of the natural order, not many Christian theologians distinguish between nature and creation. For Max Stackhouse, arguing in the context of the worldwide evolution of culture called globalization in the twenty-first century, there is more than language and vocabulary here, hence his nuanced variation between them when he contends that "creation is not nature".[5] In his words,

> …[T]he idea of creation entails a widely-shared claim about the material existence of the bio-physical universe, the variety of its elements, dynamics and forms of life, and the distinctive place humanity occupies in regard to them. It represents in one way or another a hypothetical recognition that there is a divine desire to extend some glimmer of the glory and the moral and spiritual capabilities of the Creator both into the time-space/material continuum in which life, and particularly humankind, can exist, and into the identity of the human creature.[6]

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[3] Maria Constanza Torri, and Thora Martina Herrmann, "Spiritual Beliefs and Ecological Traditions in Indigenous Communities in India: Enhancing Community-based Biodiversity Conservation," *Nature and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2011): 168-91. DOI:10.3167/nc.2011.060204.

[4] Elizabeth Allison, 2015. Religion Inscribed in the Landscape: Sacred Sites, Local Deities and Natural Resource Use in the Himalayas." In *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics*, ed. Stanley D. Brunn, 439-59. Dordrecht: Springer, 441; Torri and Herrmann: 179-80.

[5] Max L. Stackhouse, *God and Globalization*, vol. 4, *Globalization and Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 126.

[6] Stackhouse, 124.

He argues that the ability to alter the biophysical world, received as nature and process, is the creator's gift to humankind to transform nature into creation intentionally. According to Stackhouse, Christian protology, that is the study of first things, implies that:

> it is a duty of all people to see the act of creation as an outpouring of grace, a gift of being to existence itself and thus to humanity, accompanied by a commanding invitation to humans to become servants of the Creator's purposes in cultivating and, thus, altering the world as given.[7]

Evidently, as an evangelical Christian, Stackhouse privileges humankind in his idea of creation, but he does so in recognition of the dual character of nature as containing both the constant and the fluid. He writes:

> The bio-physical universe, as a gift of the Creator, seems to have two levels: the ontological level, the underlying and sustaining regularities that allow things to be at all, and that never change as long as things exist, and the phenomenal level that can be modulated by human effort — as we can see in agriculture, herding and cattle breeding, city construction and urban planning, and technological production and commercial distribution, as long histories reveal.[8]

In Stackhouse's formulation, these two dimensions of the natural order— the ontological basis of nature's existence and the pliability of its elements—constitute both the limits and the freedom with which humans are to relate to nature and thereby both sustain its essence and call forth its inherent potential. In his words, "the former implies a mandate to protect …; the latter is a manifestation of what we can do with that part of nature that is malleable".[9] According to him, "It is [the malleable] that we have a

[7] Stackhouse, 134
[8] Stackhouse, 135.
[9] Stackhouse.

mandate to make more efficient, more supportive of human flourishing; and the ability to do these things is to be seen also as part of the first gift of grace".[10]

Implicitly, in his theology of creation, Stackhouse conceives of the primal, cultural mandate of humanity as an extension of the divine capacity of humanity to create and so become co-creators with the Creator of the universe. For him, therefore, nature is the unfinished product that calls for human continuance and creative exertions, possibly vindicated by the process of evolution inherent in nature itself, not so much as an irreligious ideology but as a dynamic, scientific reality. And what he calls "the first gift of grace," I consider as a ministry as much as it is an exercise of the human capacity to promote the flourishing of the cosmos, including its human and non-human elements.

Stackhouse acknowledges the tendency of human exertions through technology to function with disregard for the moral underpinnings that should guide the human exercise of the cultural mandate to call forth the potentials of nature.[11] However, he omits to address decisively the situation where overexertion becomes so counterproductive as to threaten "the ontological basis of nature's existence," as we see in our time. Where a necessary counterbalancing effort is expended to ameliorate this technological overexertion through the quest for justice for the present and future generations, such effort will also qualify as a ministry. The need to balance both freedom and restraint in human interaction with the universe comes into bold relief in Leonardo Boff's conception of ecology as a theological category.

[10] Stackhouse.
[11] Stackhouse, 136.

2.2 Ecology

Ecology was first understood scientifically as an interactive process among organisms in the biophysical environment. Since environments are of different scales, ranging from the micro to the macro, ecological scales also vary. Nevertheless, irrespective of the scale of an environment, its ecology can be said to be in a state of equilibrium when the interacting elements sustainably complement one another's functioning and well-being. Disruptions may result from invasion from outside the stable environment or when one or more of the interacting organisms go rogue. However, the resilience of an ecological system is determined by its capacity to self-restore after disequilibrium.[12]

Today, the concept of ecology has been extended to include the social realm of human cultural welfare. The extension has evolved from the complex interactions between human beings and the biophysical environment to include the accompanying quality of human life in society worldwide. In this vein, the present state of human society in which many are consigned to the margins may be traced to the ruthless triumph of modernity, which commodifies vital environmental assets like land, water, and other resources with no concern for the consequences on human and non-human organisms in the environment. The exploitation of these resources in the name of industrialisation or capitalism has negatively impacted the biophysical world around us and the quality of human flourishing worldwide as Bruce Alexander has also observed. Leonardo Boff calls

[12] Oswald J. Schmitz, *Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2007).

the emerging integrated understanding of the ecological unity between the biophysical and human social environment "ecologico-social democracy".[13]

Ecologico-social democracy links the flourishing of ecosystems to the flourishing of human society in a mutually reinforcing symbiosis; the health or unwholesomeness of one cascades into the well-being of the other, enhancing or diminishing it. Hence, as in ecofeminism, "social ecology relates social injustice to ecological injustice." [14] From this perspective, in a world where the majority of citizens live in conditions that undermine their dignity—through exploitation by the powerful, material indigence, political disenfranchisement, and other forms of social violence—Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway submit that ecology, "the logos (or wisdom) of … our common home, the Earth," has become "the logos of suffering".[15] It thus becomes a theological category that calls for justice in the tradition of the Hebrew prophet Micah (6:8). To respond with redemptive actions to the prophet's summon in the wake of our disrupted ecological environment is to do ministry.

2.3 Poverty

Poverty is a theological subject in many religious traditions of the world. I understand poverty from four perspectives. Poverty of the mind is ignorance that comes from a lack of knowledge that is vital to effective human functioning and wellness. Poverty in spirit is self-awareness of one's inability to rise to a perceived, noble value orientation; victims pursue their quest to transcend this form of poverty through

[13] Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 84-90.

[14] Leonardo Boff, 87-88.

[15] Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway, "Ecology and Theology of Nature," 45.

intentional spiritual disciplines and self-reorientation. Poverty of spirit is the immoral state of the mind, which often indicates a lack of humaneness towards those who are vulnerable; it is meanness. And finally, material indigence is poverty characterised by want of life necessities. In our time, indigence finds expression in vulnerability to hunger, nakedness, joblessness, homelessness, dispossession, and powerlessness; they all culminate in vulnerability to debilitating addictions and social violence.

These expressions of poverty can be grouped under six different perspectives Bryant Meyers has identified in the literature of poverty. They include "poverty as deficit", "poverty as entanglement [in a 'cluster of disadvantages']", "poverty as lack of access to social power", and "poverty as diminished personal and relational wellbeing". Others are "poverty as disempowering system" and "poverty as a lack of freedom to grow".[16] He concludes that "poverty is a complicated social issue involving all areas of life—physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual"[17] and, by implication, indicates that every expression of poverty is connected to the total ecological environment in which the physical, the biotic and the moral interact, affecting the flourishing of the cosmos.

Material indigence as poverty is not necessarily the outward quality of people's resources, whether they demonstrate finesse or rusticity. External observers of peoples of the global South sometimes confuse lack of outward finesse with material poverty and erroneously project poverty into contexts otherwise amply supplied with life's necessities. On the contrary, real material poverty keeps people on the edge of the fear of

[16] Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 113-32.
[17] Myers.

the unknown because the basic needs to survive the present and the immediate future are threatened. People in such a crisis, like those in fragile ecological environments, barely eke out a living while those in well-watered rainforests tend to be abundantly furnished with nature's bounties. Both scenarios run side by side in the global South.

It should be noted that although material poverty demeans, mendicant religious orders do embrace it as a lifestyle of solidarity with the poor or as an expression of commitment to higher spiritual values. Some embrace poverty alongside voluntary obedience to temporal religious authorities and the adoption of the celibate life, completing the triad in a vow of poverty, obedience, and chastity.[18] A classic example is furnished in the Christian monastic movement. On the other hand, material indigence imposed by life's circumstances undermines human dignity and imperils the life of its victims. Every exertion to remove such affront to the dignity of the human person will qualify as ministry irrespective of where it is classified in human endeavors as religious or secular. It is a redemptive service to the "the last, the least and the lost".[19]

2.4 Urban Community Gardens as the Nexus of Eco-theological Themes

Urban community gardens are social spaces where participating gardeners interact with one another and the environment. The depth of interaction is determined by individual needs and the personal traits of sociability and gregariousness. Other factors

[18] Richard Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985).

[19] This used to be a common phrase among North American Christian communities who worked among vulnerable members of society. It derived from Jesus's inversion of values in the popular culture of his days as recorded in his parables: The Last: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16, NIV); the least: "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 24:40, NIV); and the Lost: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Matthew 18: 11, NIV).

include individual environmental awareness and the ability to garden reflectively and draw inspiration from the positive stimuli in the garden.

Some gardens function with prepared programs that involve various practical and theoretical learning for the gardeners, howbeit informal. Others centre on food security. Irrespective of how their programs run, gardeners who approach urban community gardens do so to meet specific needs in their lives. Happily, many gardens provide various learning and giving opportunities for gardeners. This approach is especially so when generous volunteer-gardeners participate alongside those who are challenged in various domains of life. Increasingly, urban gardens are being tailored to meet the needs of underserved elements in the urban environment, and they are providing opportunities for those who are privileged to share their time, skills, and knowledge with the disadvantaged. Therapolis is one of such gardens where this human interaction aids in restoring broken people to wholeness.

Practically, gardeners interact with one another socially while engaging with the earth in the cultivation, weeding, and harvesting of produce. These engagements draw from human physical energy, mental faculty, and social skills. Those whose minds have been trained to perceive the dynamics of change through the seasons also have the capacity to internalize valuable lessons with which they regain the mastery over their lives. In these redemptive interactions and forms of productivity, we see the three eco-theological themes at play.

The work on the soil brings people into a living contact with nature and, through their activities, call forth its potential to meet their needs. In cultivating, weeding, and harvesting produce, gardeners exercise the mandate to create opportunities for themselves

as they work with the pliable elements of nature—soil, water, and seeds. These activities take place in the interconnection of the garden's biotic and social ecologies, the former being responsible for the fruitful harvest of produce and the latter providing an enabling social environment of trust and support that renews confidence in relationships and makes possible the rediscovery of self-in-society. This is the recipe that, in the long run, turns underserved urbanites into useful citizens, making the interconnected ecologies of the community garden a matrix of human transformation.

It should be stated, however, that the results of human transformation in the interactions of the biotic and social ecologies of the garden is not a linear process. If anything, it can be a staccato movement which the "poor," recovering gardener might repeat in cycles of years to perfect their socio-ethical reflexes and fully gain mastery over their selves. The factors of personality and mentorship, another dimension of human ecology, are very complex to delineate for prediction. Regardless, the three key themes of nature and creation, ecology, and poverty are the eco-theological concerns involved in urban community gardening, making it a viable context through which to take the emerging discipline beyond mental education to present, living reality. This process is demonstrated in the following idiographic study of a group of gardeners at Therapolis.

Chapter 3

Christian Eco-theology: A Literature Review

At the roots of the emerging theological discourse on the ecological environment is the question of how Christians are to see and appropriate the bounties of nature in a world in which human consumption of resources has become unsustainable. The need to take a position has been heightened by the increasing ecological stress impinging particularly on vulnerable peoples and other sentient beings in the environment while also threatening the planet. In response to these developments, the philosophical bellicosity between religion and science is thawing, and the Christian constituency is making progress in reformulating its theology. Unlike in the past, science is illuminating a religious understanding of the world of nature, and faith is leading science beyond the material realm by underscoring the ethical implications of overexploiting nature's resources. Although this symbiosis is still in its infancy and remains enmeshed in ideological contestation, the profound influence of ecological awareness on the teachings of the Church is being seen as "an opportunity and a challenge for renewal and reformation".[1] Phyllis Tickle calls this "Emergence Christianity".[2]

This literature review is interested in the emerging theologies of the environment with an especial focus on three major doctrines of the church – pneumatology,

[1] Ernst M. Conradie, "Ecumenical Discourse on Pneumatology and Ecology," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6, no. 3 (January 2012): 189.

[2] Tickle sees the emerging Christian response to the ecological challenges as consistent with her perceived half-millennium cycles of theological renewal of the life of the Church in human history. Phyllis Tickle, "Emergence Christianity," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aG-GNvDeFV8.

soteriology and eschatology - and how they are currently being reconfigured in the light of the growing ecological vision of Christian thinkers in western Christianity. It is also interested in weighing the current efforts being undertaken to appreciate their weaknesses. The three classical doctrines are foundational to our understanding of current Christian eco-theology. The doctrine of the incarnation is not treated as a specific topic as it is diffused through the three doctrines. The review also looks at these doctrines' approaches to finding active expression through the ethics of eco-justice.

3.1 The Background: Sacramental Theology

The perceived kinship between the Christian faith and the ecological environment is not just being discovered and confessed. As implied above, Church traditions founded on a sacramental understanding of life and reality have always acknowledged this fact in their liturgies. While the term "sacrament" has mainly been used to describe church rituals and ceremonies, the application has been extended to various experiences of encounters with the divine in the ordinariness of everyday life. As a divine creation and matrix of God's self-revelation, John Hart, Leonardo Boff, and Thomas Berry call the natural world a "sacramental universe" and its diverse flourishing ecosystem "sacramental commons".[3] Both the sacramental universe and its commons "express complementary perceptions of divine immanence in, and engagement with humanity through, the created cosmos."[4]

[3] John Hart, Leonardo Boff, and Thomas Berry, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), xiii-xviii.

[4] Hart, Boff, and Berry.

Like other contemporary Christian thinkers,[5] it is noteworthy that they did not formulate their theology of creation in scientific isolation, which they ascribed to "the dynamic realization of divine imagination".[6] Rather, for them, the continuous emergence of the universe over billions of years in all its complexities and in conformity with the laws of sciences – physics, chemistry and biology – has been "periodically stimulated and enhanced by contingent events or by the Spirit's creative power".[7] Implicitly, for them, the discoveries of science do not nullify the ascription of creative intelligence to the Spirit of God, while the doctrine of the latter does not necessarily negate discovered scientific laws. Instead, it is within this scientifically emergent process and workings of the Spirit that we may understand in the liturgies of sacramental church traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran—the epithets ascribed to God as the creator, sustainer and redeemer of the universe.

What light does the renewed understanding of the environment as a creation sustained and redeemed by God through his Spirit shed on the old confession? It is that while the different elements of nature are bound together by specific ecological parameters so that they function in their divinely allotted, complementary roles, they receive life from the Spirit. The sciences have discovered many of the laws and dynamics that hold them together in their stable ecological interactions, but they have not been able to explain the source of their "living-ness". Stephen Hawking expressed this as much.[8]

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[5] Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis books), 8-14.
[6] Hart, Boff, and Berry, *Sacramental Commons,* xiii.
[7] Hart, Boff, and Berry, 3.
[8] Stephen Hawking submitted, "Even if there is only one possible unified theory [for scientists to describe the universe], it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? The usual approach of science constructing a mathematical model cannot answer the questions of why there should be a universe

Christian theology ascribes that life to the divine Spirit, *rua'ch* in Hebrew.[9] In acknowledging the sciences, Christian thinkers in the 21st century are making Christian theology and science intellectual allies, moving them towards a mutually nutritive juncture in contemporary understanding of the environment as a divine-scientific reality.[10] This alliance holds three implications, at least.

First, this new understanding leaves behind the hard-crusted dichotomy between the realm of nature and the realm of the Spirit, especially as posited by the nineteenth-century theologian Albrecht Ritschl.[11] Second, it means the acknowledgement of the sustaining presence of the Spirit in creation surpasses the traditional perceptions of indigenous religions of the world, which tend to put the primacy of sacredness on the pristine. It also transcends places designated as sacred for religious worship.[12] Rather, it follows that if the empirical discoveries of the sciences in understanding nature are true revelations within the scientific genre, then the technological products derived from those discoveries can be no less sacred. In fact, they may be regarded as manifestations of the divine Spirit's continuing activity in creation while they are produced with an eye on

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for the model to describe." *The Illustrated a Brief History of Time*, updated and expanded ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 232.

[9] Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis books), 31; World Council of Churches—Council for World Mission and Evangelism (WCC-CWME), "God's Transforming Spirit: Reflections on Mission, Spirituality and Creation," *International Review of Mission* 101, no. 1 (April 2012): 61.

[10] Philip Kariatlis, "An Examination of the Theological-Ethical Contributions of Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia to Creation Theology and Environmental Issues," *Phromena* 31, no. 2 (2016):24.

[11] See: Kirk Wegter-McNelly, "Difference within Theology of Nature: The Strategies of Intelligibility and Credibility," *The Journal of Faith and Science Exchange* (August 2012): 241, https://hdl.handle.net/2144/3984; Jonathan R. Wilson, *God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 116-17.

[12] Hart, Boff, and Berry, *Sacramental Commons*, xiv.

their ecological soundness. Max Stackhouse is explicit on this point.[13] Third, the believed ongoing presence of the Spirit in creation paradoxically makes creation the nexus of the two attributes of God as both immanent and transcendent.[14] The former inevitably implies panentheism (God filling all creation), and the latter God's sovereignty or unlimitedness through the Spirit.

3.2 Doctrinal Formulations

Currently, many Christian eco-theologies are being formulated around three classical doctrines of the Church: the doctrine of the Spirit, the doctrine of salvation, and the doctrine of the end. These three doctrines have received attention from eco-theologians, and their basic contours are delineated below.

3.2.1 Pneumatology: The Doctrine of the Spirit

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of much of the Christian theological rethinking on the ecological environment today. The confessed presence of the Holy Spirit in creation forms the basis of eco-theology, which highlights the significance of that presence as active, sustaining, and redemptive. Hitherto, mainline churches have confessed the active presence of the Spirit in the world, especially regarding Christian missions, social change, and the providential ordering of human history. On the other hand, traditions that emphasize the charisma of the Holy Spirit have championed the immediacy of the Spirit's presence at worship through verbal and non-verbal demonstration of that presence, especially through the workings of miracles. This latter

[13] Max L. Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace*, vol. 4, *God and Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 135.

[14] Philip Kariatlis, "An Examination of the Theological-Ethical Contributions": 25.

understanding presupposes the suspension of natural laws for human benefit as in the magical practices of indigenous religions.

Beyond these two broad traditions are other shades of perspectives in understanding the presence of the divine in the ecological environment. To this end, Ernst Conradie has identified among Christian theologians in the last two decades the development of pneumatology in conjunction with ecology.[15] Many more perspectives have been brought into the combined study in recent years. In his words, they "come from diverging perspectives, including liberation theology, process theology, ecofeminism, the legacy of Teilhard de Chardin, new age mysticism, neo-pagan practices, indigenous theologies and various forms of creation spirituality".[16] Others "seek to retrieve the vision of classic Christian theologians such as Basil of Caesarea … and Gregory of Nazianzus…. Yet other contributions are situated within the context of ecumenical dialogue on Faith and Order or Life and Work".[17]

Conradie's reference to ecumenical dialogue comes from the study document that emerged from the Athens 2010 Mission and Spirituality consultation of the Working Group of the Council for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in cooperation with the Climate Change Programme of WCC and the WCC Indigenous Peoples Project. Characteristically, the document liberally draws from contemporary theological movements from below, particularly conceiving the presence of the Spirit of God, *rua'ch,* in creation in the feminine gender with its associated

[15] Ernst M. Conradie, "Ecumenical Discourse on Pneumatology and Ecology": 190-91.
[16] Conradie: 191-92.
[17] Conradie: 192.

character of fecundity, nurturance and vulnerability in an overwhelmingly patriarchal world.[18]

Current developments in perspectives, sources, and methods in pneumatology remain diverse and need coherence and alignment with other teachings of the church.[19] Notable in this array is the most vociferous movement on the work of the Spirit in contemporary Christianity, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. The movement is presently blind to the theology of the Spirit as it concerns the ecological environment, but very much engrossed with private salvation from present human woes due to existential and socio-political societal predicaments, especially in the South where post-colonial societies are unravelling. Yet, glimmers of hope are rising again in the western Evangelical tradition as Davis Bookless and Katharine Hayhoe venture in their blogs and essays.[20]

Where the connection between the Holy Spirit and ecology has been made in emerging Christian eco-theology, the presence of the Holy Spirit in creation is still akin to its classical understanding in the mainline churches, but it now provides the basis for redemptive action in an age of ecological stress. Pneumatology, in this way, shares similarities with indigenous people's understanding of the active presence of the super-

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[18] WCC-CWME, "God's Transforming Spirit": 63-4. The encyclical of Pope Francis, *"Laudato Si,"* carries the same feminine ethos in its reference to creation as "sister" and "mother earth". See: "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home", http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf.

[19] Ernst M. Conradie, "Ecumenical Discourse on Pneumatology and Ecology": 193-94.

[20] David Bookless, "Earth, Wind and Fire: A Pentecostal Approach to Creation Care," June 6, 2019, https://blog.arocha.org/en/earth-wind-and-fire-a-pentecostal-approach-to-creation-care/; Megan Von Bergen and Bethany Mannon, **"**Talking Climate Faith: Katharine Hayhoe and Christian Rhetoric(s) of Climate Change," *Enculturation,* November 10, 2020, https://www.enculturation.net/Talking%20Climate%20Faith.

sensible in nature, the basis for the misnomer "nature worship".[21] Yet it is different in that while the belief in the presence of elemental spirits in nature serves as the motivation for magic in indigenous religions, or the manipulation of phenomena for private ends, the renewed understanding of the presence of the Holy Spirit in creation invites Christian people to tread softly in God's holy "temple" by living in harmony with the designs of nature even if they have the mandate to call forth its potentials as co-creators with the divine. This contrast is essential as pneumatology in Christian eco-theology can easily be misconstrued as sacralising nature and be mislabelled as neopaganism.

3.2.2 Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation

In his 1984 encyclical, "Reconciliation and Penance," John Paul II ascribed the growing ecological challenges facing the world due to sinful human nature. According to him, "Since by sinning man [sic] refuses to submit to God, his internal balance is also destroyed, and it is precisely within himself that contradictions and conflicts arise. Wounded in this way, man almost inevitably causes damage to the fabric of his relationship with others and with the created world."[22] More positively, however, the Pope wrote two year later:

> The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh": the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a

[21] I call it a misnomer because the people do not see themselves as worshipping nature itself. Rather, they reverence the spirits believed to inhabit and energize natural elements like trees, water bodies, land, sky, and other natural phenomena. They believe these spirits are more powerful than human beings and can hurt or help them, depending on their approaches.

[22] John Paul II, "Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Reconciliation and Penance of John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy, and Faithful on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today," 1984, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.pdf; Pope Francis, *"Laudato Si"*.

> cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation," becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also "flesh" and in this reality with all "flesh," with the whole of creation.[23]

Catholic and Protestant theologies will agree on this spiritual root of contemporary ecological challenges and the significance of the incarnation for our valuing the natural world. Yet, for too long, the anthropocentric understanding of salvation in western Christianity, especially in the Protestant tradition, produced an otherworldly-oriented spirituality that denigrates the material world in which human beings and other sentient beings coexist.[24] And although the Christian proclamation affirms the spiritual reign of God in the world and, as the Pope implies, the incarnation put the lie on the comparative inferiority of the material to the spiritual, the doctrine of salvation in enlightenment Christianity did not place premium importance on the comprehensive nature of redemption until the recent decades of global ecological challenges. Consequently, it was easy for western Christianity to acquiesce to the rabid consumption of nature's resources now leaving behind an ecological imbalance.

If the incarnation prepared the groundwork for the belief in the intrinsic value of the natural world, the doctrine of salvation in the age of ecological distress is rooted in

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[23] John Paul II, "On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World," 1986, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.pdf.

[24] Mary E. Tucker, *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), 44-5; Stratford Caldecott, "At Home in the Cosmos: The Revealing of the Sons of God," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 10 (2012): 106; Dave Bookless, "A Famine of Hope: Christian Mission and the Search for a Sustainable Future," *Global Connections Occasional Paper* 26 (Summer 2007): i-ii; Ilsup Ahn, "Deconstructing Eschatological Violence Against Ecology: Planting Images of Ecological Justice," *Cross Currents* (June 2017): 458-75; Douglass J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 451.

the belief in the active presence of the Holy Spirit in creation, saving and redeeming it from corruption. In this way, creation is understood as the totality of all beings that share life on the planet and not just humanity.[25] And the road to ecological salvation lies in human beings exercising social justice among themselves, in their consumption of nature's resources, and in ways that "ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations."[26]

Implicit within this expanding awareness of the comprehensive nature of salvation is a call to reconceive the mission of God in the world and not to discard the earth "once our souls are saved, but … also to be transformed through the *ru'ach's* grace".[27] Drawing on the exhortation of John Paul II, Stratford Caldecott sees this transformation of humanity as central to the salvation of the ecological environment as he writes:

> The healing of the world around us depends on a re-ordering and a healing of the inner world of [human] imagination, intelligence, and will. Man [sic] was intended to be the mediator of creation, the one in whom all things connect, through whom all things are reconciled, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15–20). This high calling is fulfilled in Christ, the new Adam, into whom we are baptized when we receive the Holy Spirit.[28]

Making the salvation of the present ecological environment contingent on human "imagination, intelligence, and will" is, however, problematic. Can "wounded" humanity that has inflicted so much damage on the ecological environment still be its means of

[25] WCC-CWME, "God's Transforming Spirit": 76-7.

[26] Nancy G. Wright, "Christianity and Environmental Justice," *Cross Currents* 61, no. 2 (June 2011): 169.

[27] WCC-CWME, "God's Transforming Spirit": 77; Dave Bookless, "A Famine of Hope": ii.

[28] Caldecott, "At Home in the Cosmos": 108.

salvation? This question leads to the doctrine of eschatology as it is being reformulated concerning the present global environmental crisis.

3.2.3 Eschatology: The Doctrine of the End

The Christian doctrine of the end of history is another field in which ecological theologies are currently playing out. The destiny of humankind and the end of history have received attention from Christian thinkers but, again, with human beings as the focus of redemption and eternal reward. On the other hand, and in contrast to the sanguine hope expected to herald the final redemption of saved humanity, popular Christian spirituality denigrates the present material world believed to be reserved for conflagration. In the age of ecological stress, the silent ecological aspects of the Christian scriptures, both the obvious and those that are less so, are shining out and receiving attention. Theologically, however, the development of eschatology in the light of the fate of the earth is tied to hope.[29]

Throughout history, hope has been considered essential to human survival and wellbeing. Given the present human ecological dysfunction—evident in unmitigated economic imbalance and the festering of poverty, diseases, and disabilities—the contemporary, postmodern world is rethinking this assumption.[30] The level of degradation that has been meted out to the ecological environment and the ideological resistance to its amelioration by the powerful also trump the hope of restoring ecological balance.

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[29] Caldecott; Willa Swenson-Lengyel, "Beyond Eschatology – Environmental Pessimism and the Future of Human Hoping," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45, no. 3 (August 2017): 431.

[30] Oliver Burkeman, "This Column Will Change Your Life: The Case Against Hope," *The Guardian* – International Edition, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/apr/12/change-your-life-case-against-hope.

Moreover, the conflicting attitudes of denial, unbelief and self-seeking by interested persons and groups render the possibility of realizing healing hopeless, especially when hope is anchored "closely to moral motivation and end-setting action."[31] Where such an end-setting appears unrealizable, moral motivation takes flight with hope. Still, the contention over perspectives between advocates of anthropocentric, eco-centric and theocentric views of nature adds to the brewing sense of hopelessness.[32] However, current theological thinking on ecology is nuancing the concept of hope, making a distinction between glib uses of the word and its essential understanding[33] while also arguing its theological foundations and value for life.[34]

Christian hope arises in the context of doubt and uncertainty,[35] and the Christian theology of hope was developed by Jürgen Moltmann in the twentieth century as a fitting response to the despair that followed the two major wars of the century and the continuing threats of human self-destruction during the cold-war era. The theology is founded on the premise that God suffers with humanity and, through the resurrection, offers humanity hope. Even more so, the cosmic Christ who was raised bodily from death presents creation with the ultimate model and hope of final renewal, and not destruction.[36]

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[31] Willa Swenson-Lengyel, "Beyond Eschatology": 431; Hermen Kroesbergen, "Ecology: Its Relative Importance and Absolute Irrelevance for a Christian: A Kierkegaardian Transversal Space for the Controversy on Eco-theology," *HTS Theological Studies* 70, no 1 (November 2014): 1-8. https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/2719/5074.

[32] Dave Bookless, "A Famine of Hope": i.

[33] Caldecott, "At Home in the Cosmos": 109-12; Willa Swenson-Lengyel, 413-30.

[34] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* [On Christian Hope] https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.pdf.

[35] Willa Swenson-Lengyel, "Beyond Eschatology": 431.

[36] Ilsup Ahn, "Deconstructing Eschatological Violence": 461.

A critique of Moltmann's theology of hope observes that he links hope "exclusively to eschatology" without addressing the ethical concomitant in the here and now. Ilsup Ahn complements his "future-oriented" theology with "future-directed" ethics of settling accounts as in Jesus' parable of the talents:

> Christians' present struggle toward the full realization of ecological justice in an anticipation of God's eschaton becomes their ethical responsibility. Indeed, the future-directed motif of anticipation helps us have a better understanding of our ethical responsibility and ecological justice. To be more specific, in anticipation of the full realization of ecological justice, Christians are to organize their actions to bring it to concrete realization step by step. In this respect, we can say that the development of ecological eschatology and the enhancement of ecological justice are in fact deeply interconnected.[37]

This ethical emphasis on the human agential role in the restoration of creation to wholeness is a retrieval of the pre-Fall mandate to humanity as its "mediator"[38] of nurture, misunderstood as a license to oppress nature. This retrieval is a common denominator, understood as the ethical concomitant, in the different approaches to Christian eco-theology.[39] Yet, the culture of hopelessness about the situation challenges the value of human engagement with creation towards an end of transformation. The solution to this impasse may lie in Caldecott's entwining of eschatological hope with faith in God's promised redemption and evident love for creation, that is, ecological conversion.[40] The trinity of faith, hope, and love is, therefore, the potential motivation to believe that wounded but healed humanity can meaningfully engage in their vocation to

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[37] Ahn, 471.

[38] Caldecott, "At Home in the Cosmos": 106-08.

[39] Ilsup Ahn, "Deconstructing Eschatological Violence": 464; Folarin George, "From Primordial Curse to Eschatological Restoration: Ecological challenges from Genesis 3:14–20 and Romans 8:18–25," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no 1 (September 2011), doi: 10.4120/ve.v32i1.492.

[40] Caldecott, "At Home in the Cosmos": 110-11.

tend the blighted garden of God through "future-directed" ethics of environmental stewardship.[41]

3.3 Eco-theology from the Ideological Left

Beyond the emerging doctrinal approaches to Christian theology of the environment, as highlighted above, some individual Christian thinkers from liberation theology have also canvased eco-theologies that critically draw from history, philosophy, and non-Western traditions. These are academics from mainline Christian traditions whose thoughts challenge the prevailing culture of western ecological depredation, the exploitation of the weak, and the entrenchment of the global, predatory economic system of capitalism. On this theological left are Leonardo Boff, Sallie McFague, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. While Boff remains generically liberationist in his eco-theology, McFague and Ruether see eco-theology as an extension of the feminist quest for just social relations in society, hence ecofeminism. This literature review will address only the liberationist motif of the eco-theological left, as proposed by Leonardo Boff.

Leonardo Boff expresses his understanding of the prevailing human relations with the environment as an ecological process in need of liberation, hence the title of his work *Ecology and Liberation – A New Paradigm*.[42] Boff argues that western Enlightenment's perception of reality as material to be simply analysed for use, rather than as a complex combination of the sensible and the super-sensible to be understood and approached integrally, accounts for our global ecological dysfunction. Being out of balance, the

[41] The various movements to this end through education, religious awareness, various alliances, and more efficient technologies can be regarded as efforts to recover the vocation.

[42] Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation – A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995).

Enlightenment isolated human well-being from the global interactive environment in which we function with other creatures and brought the total ecological environment under stress. Boff conceives of ecological balance as:

> … a process of moving towards ever-greater communion (living with harmony and justice with others, both humans and other-than-humans), diversity (respecting and celebrating different ways of perceiving and being-in-the world), and self-organization (seeking meaning, purpose, creativity, and depth).[43]

For Boff, such a consciously multidimensional perspective on global ecological relations would present a balanced human understanding of reality as indigenous perspectives demonstrate. It would also have called for a restrained appropriation of natural resources. And it would have awakened us to the impacts of human activities on all living beings in the environment, including ourselves as a species in the same biophysical and cultural environment.

Lacking in this restraint, Enlightenment does not perceive intrinsic value in things beyond their utility purposes for the human species and views everything as an expendable commodity.[44] Its deepest flaw is its notion of unlimited progress, a linear understanding of history as an endless possibility in human interaction with the ecological environment. The result has been a pollution and destabilization of the ecological environment. In the global south, the liberal political economy of Enlightenment that dominates international relations and powers profit motive continues

[43] Boff and Hathaway, "Ecology and Theology of Nature," 49.

[44] Chelsea Batavia and Michael Paul Nelson, "For Goodness Sake! What Is Intrinsic Value and Why should We Care?" *Biological Conservation* 209 (May 2017): 367. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2017.03.003.

to produce a conflicted environment of disconnected citizenries characterized by hunger, hopelessness, and despair.[45]

3.4 Ethics and Eco-theology

As a theology in search of praxis, Christian ethics is drawing from the emerging theological formulations to contribute to the necessary Christian response to the ecological crisis of our time. Of all the Christian intellectual disciplines, ethics remains the foremost in directly interfacing with secular society.[46] Although western Christianity is publicly in recession, yielding its erstwhile cultural centre to an amorphous agglomeration of various religions and spiritualities, Christianity-informed social ethics remain in contention for the soul of society where it engages in developments in the sciences, arts, economics, and businesses.[47] Among Christians, social ethics is arguing from various perspectives for a responsible engagement with the ecological and social environment.

Christian ecological ethics is premised on "environmental virtues" or "virtue ethics"[48] that are cultivated through habitual practices, the result of which constitutes ecological conversion: a sense of "solidarity with the creatures that make up our

[45] J. W. Smith, *The World's Wasted Wealth 2: Save Our Wealth, Save Our Environment* (Cambria, CA: Institute for Economic Democracy, 1994), 58-69, 90-91, 150-51.

[46] I use the word "secular" here not with respect to irreligion but as plurality of religions and ideologies.

[47] The interface is being led by Christian academics, lay and ordained, in the humanities, sciences and social sciences. Non-academic lay Christians are also making significant contributions. Margaret Somerville, *The Ethical Imagination: Journeys of the Human Spirit* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2006); Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Common-Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 2002).

[48] Kathryn D. Blanchard and Kevin J. O'Brien, *An Introduction to Christian Environmentalism: Ecology, Virtue, and Ethics* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 12; Ronald L. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

planetary community."[49] To this end, Blanchard and O'Brien, like Caldecott, have coupled four classical virtues of prudence, courage, temperance, and justice with the trinity of faith, hope, and love.[50] In the turbulent world of contention between ideologies, where ecological degradation calls for "preservation, restoration and conservation,"[51] Christian ecological ethics seek to equip Christians and their communities for the long-haul attention presently required by global ecological degradation.

However, John Chryssavgis offers an ethical response of "in-action or mere awareness" towards ecological reclamation. By this, he means a pause that allows us to contemplate the harm that has been done and "gain new 'insight' into our world, …abandon the urge for unbridled expansion and focus on the sustainability we so desperately need".[52] Here we find the Orthodox method of theological discourse that places a premium on contemplation as foundational to ethics. By no means advocating passivity, the contemplative approach to eco-justice is a personal or collective discipline that seeks to gain insights into the crisis at hand and thus arrive at the knowledge of appropriate redemptive actions.

3.5 Research Prospects in Christian Eco-theologies

The ongoing efforts at crafting Christian eco-theologies are yielding interesting perspectives, even if awareness and commitment among the faithful are lagging. Could it be that the method of crafting the emerging theologies is out of sync with the people or

[49] Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith,* 112.
[50] Blanchard and O'Brien, *An Introduction to Christian Environmentalism.*
[51] Hart, Boff, and Berry, *Sacramental Commons,* 204-06.
[52] John Chryssavgis, *Three Perspectives on the Sacred: Healing Wisdom from the Desert, the Mountain, and the Cosmos* - The Augustana Distinguished Lectures (Camrose, Alberta: The Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life, 2015), 38.

needs some form of reinforcing experiences? Contemporary theologies are emerging from exegetical expositions of Hebrew and Christian scriptures and philosophical reflections. The sciences too are informing these emerging theologies. However, years of secularizing society and utilizing environmental resources as mere commodities cannot be wished away by words. There is a need for demonstrable actions to inform Christian communities about the value of the ecological environment for human well-being. To this end, this dissertation explores urban community gardening as an example of human practical engagement with the environment that may indicate its value beyond the material benefits it offers.

Can the growing understanding of the importance of the ecological environment to our well-being, as practiced in community gardening, bring the lessons of exegetical expositions and philosophical reflections home to Christian folks? Several religious and residential communities in the city promote urban community gardening, but their emphasis is essentially on food security. This approach has value; but more often, human service agencies are drawing benefits from gardening for their clients beyond food security. This ascription of value to gardening beyond food security may offer Christian communities the opportunity to bring home to their people the transcendent values inherent in so engaging the ecological environment.

Another unstudied trend toward Christian eco-theology is the impact of the 1990 "Joint Appeal in Religion and Science"[53] on Christian communities. In response to the

[53] National Religious Partnership for the Environment, "The Joint Appeal in Religion and Science: Statement by Religious Leaders at the Summit on Environment." June 3, 1991, https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Joint%20Appeal.pdf.

appeal, some denominations have developed Bible studies and training resources to educate and sensitize their congregations of the need to reduce their carbon footprints. Some churches are retrofitting their buildings to make them energy efficient. Environmental education has also been integrated into the curriculums of some Christian colleges and schools. After three decades of this appeal, it may be time to evaluate the traction this historic development has generated in the ministries of the churches towards Christian ecological sensibility. How much has the idea of ecological sensibility percolated through ministerial formation?

Still, it may not be too early to study how old and new ecologically focused, Western evangelical mission movements like A Rocha[54] and SIM[55] are carrying out their ecological missions in the southern hemisphere, where national economies are rooted in the extractive industry. What local resources are they leveraging to make a difference? How are they navigating territories under predatory regimes and influential personalities with vested interests in environmental resources? And what resources are they applying to inform the significant Christian populace that sees natural resources as a divine endowment for human material prosperity? How successful or unsuccessful have they been? These are areas to investigate and ascertain what Christian communities are contributing to the global solution to the current ecological crisis.

[54] A Rocha, https://arocha.org/en/.

[55] See: Barbara M. Cooper, *Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

3.6 Conclusion

The contemporary ecological crisis is a public issue that calls for Christian thoughts on the environment. In response, Christian thinkers have brought to bear on the crisis the doctrines of salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the end, among others.[56] They have also drawn insights from the sciences and non-Western traditions. There are two ways to interpret this development: the application or the reformulation of old doctrines. The former perceives the development as a broadening of perspective on doctrines that have hitherto been exclusively applied to humanity to the extent of losing perspective on the larger ecological environment in which humanity functions. This approach is a rehabilitative understanding of current Christian eco-theologies.

The latter interpretation takes the ecological environment as its starting point in reformulating theology and recognizes the emergence and flourishing of humanity as integral to the emergence and flourishing of the cosmos. This latter understanding is no less rehabilitative, but it is revolutionary in that it brings humanity and other beings in the cosmos to the same level in the understanding of redemption. The theologies of the radical left make this argument.

However, both application and reformulation understandings of emerging eco-theologies raise a question. Since their cerebral nature may be too complex for ordinary citizens, can a more practical and intentional engagement with the ecological environment, as in community gardening, yield insights for Christians committed to a

[56] Apart from the central doctrines of the church, recent academic works have also advanced covenantal and agapeic approaches to the environment, while stewardship remains the theological staple in Evangelical tradition. The constraint of space makes it impossible to explore them here.

practical understanding of the environment? While the uses and the impacts of community gardening on human wellbeing have been studied, and faith-based community gardens are gradually emerging,[57] it does not seem their theological implications for understanding God's creation and their value for the ecological formation of Christian people have been appreciated by Christian eco-theologians. Among all the potential research that may court the attention of eco-theology, I have determined on this investigation.

[57] Sine, *Creating a Faith Based Community Garden*; Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating,* 2nd. Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 75-112.

Part II: An Idiographic Study of Urban Gardeners

Chapter 4

Community Gardening as Eco-theology in Practice

My quest to identify a lived Christian eco-theology inspired my idiographic exploration of the experiences of a group of gardeners at Therapolis. Community gardening is but one among many possible ways to explore how to practically stir the affection of the Christian faithful for the beautiful world given us humans to tend from generation to generation. As stated earlier, intellectual assent to complex theological formulation is not making the desired difference in attitude toward creation. However, a study of a group of gardeners at Therapolis indicates that community gardening can be a transforming gateway into the consciousness of Christian believers to value and cherish the land.

The universality of gardening makes this creative engagement with the soil, in community, a veritable prospect for replicating this learning model. Yet, it is amenable to the local contexts and shifting realities of the faithful.

4.1 The Origins

Urban community gardening, also called urban agriculture, evolved in the late nineteenth century as a palliative measure to assist lower-class families in the industrial centres of North America. It also became popular during the wartime depression of the twentieth century as families eked out a living to survive.[1] However, the contemporary urban community gardening movement started as a marginal response to the need for human safety in New York City's run-down Bowery neighbourhood in the Spring of

[1] Jeffrey Hou, "Urban Community Gardens as Multimodal Social Spaces." In *Greening Cities: Forms and functions,* Advances in 21st Century Human Settlements, ed. P.Y. Tan and C.Y. Jim (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2017), 116. DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4113-6_6.

1973.[2] The success of the Bowery initiative has since been replicated across the cities of North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. Specifically, its success in affirming the dignity of underserved peoples and communities through civic education, nutrition improvement, skill development, and a quality environment has commended it to city planners, housing programs, health managers, and social workers as a tool for rehabilitating disadvantaged city dwellers.[3] What has the literature to say in this respect?

4.2 A Brief Survey of Literature

Since this dissertation is an engagement in practical theology, this survey is being undertaken to place in context my ideographical investigations of the gardeners. My aim is to use urban community garden as a laboratory to inform the emerging Christian ecological thinking and argue for an aspect that is underexplored. I expect this entwining of the two subjects of community gardening and eco-theology to illuminate our value of the total ecological environment for the flourishing of the cosmos, ourselves included.

To review the literature of urban community gardening, I searched the following primary databases: EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, Academia, Research Gate, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The keywords for the search included urban gardening, urban agriculture, urban forestry, urban food security, and urban recreation.

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[2] "Ecotipping Point - Urban Community Gardening (New York City)," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDf0cbPPbJg&feature=emb_logo.

[3] Alberta Health Services (AHS) has incorporated community gardening into some of their care programs through professional, recreational therapists at Therapolis. See also: Suzanne Stluka *et al*., "Gardening for Health: Using Garden Coordinators and Volunteers to Implement Rural School and Community Gardens," *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy* 16, E156 (November 2019): 1-5, https://doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.190117; Donna Armstrong, "A Survey of Community Gardens in Upstate New York: Implications for Health Promotion and Community Development. *Health Place* 6, no. 4 (December 2000): 319-27. DOI: 10.1016/s1353-8292(00)00013-7.

4.2.1 A Multimodal Enterprise

Extant studies indicate that urban gardening continues to gain attention among health and social workers in Europe and North America as an emerging corrective to the social, economic, and psychological effects of urban culture. Jeffrey Hou and other researchers observe that these gardens are gaining appreciation as "multimodal" spaces, thereby contributing to the well-being of those involved and their communities.[4]

The literature reveals that urban gardening facilitates city people's access to fresh food products, thereby improving their levels of nutrition as they also enhance food security in partnership with city food banks.[5] The gardens provide opportunities for people who would have been sedentary to engage in productive physical activities.[6] They improve participants' mental health as they experience significance through the culture of productivity the gardens facilitate.[7] Socially, urban community gardens have become civic learning centres for participants' skill acquisition and self-development, thus contributing to social capital by fostering intercultural and democratic engagements.[8]

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[4] As multimodal spaces, Jeffrey Hou describes the qualities and functions of urban community gardens as convivial, cultural, inclusive, restorative, democratic, and resilient spaces. See "Urban Community Gardens as Multimodal Social Spaces," (2017), 119-30; Sarah Wakefield *et al*., "Growing Urban Health: Community Gardening in South-East Toronto." *Health Promotion International*22, no. 2 (June 2007): 92-101. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dam001; Marion Tharrey *et al*., "Does Participating in Community Gardens Promote Sustainable Lifestyles in Urban Settings? Design and Protocol of the JArDinS Study," *BMC Public Health* 19, 589 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6815-0.

[5] Bethaney Turner, "Embodied Connections: Sustainability, Food Systems and Community Gardens," *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 16, no. 6 (2011): 509-22. DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2011.569537.

[6] Donna Armstrong, "A Survey of Community Gardens in Upstate New York".

[7] Armstrong.

[8] Rina Ghose and Margaret Pettygrove, "Urban Community Gardens as Spaces of Citizenship," *Antipode* (September 2014): 1-21. DOI: 10.1111/anti.12077; Wakefield *et al*., "Growing Urban Health."

The greening effect of urban gardening enhances the sustainability of a city's ecology and mitigates the impacts of synthetic human intrusion into the natural environment, especially pollution.[9] Finally, participants have indicated spiritual connections with nature through the primal feel of physically engaging with earth and vegetation in the urban gardening experience.[10]

4.2.2 The Ideological Dimension

While participants in urban community gardening are aware of the value of their enterprise, the movement's chief protagonists are also conscious of the ideological implication of their undertakings. Urban community gardens represent the empowerment of the underserved residents of urban communities whose immediate quest is often food security.[11] However, the synthetic feel and massive scale of the urban environment, with its powerful institutions that tend to defer to the interests of the influential elements and businesses, intimidate marginal people and ride roughshod over them in policymaking. This "urban neoliberalism" inevitably evokes in the disadvantaged population and their sponsors a subtle ideological contestation for what urban spaces should look like, both

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[9] Wakefield *et al*.; David J. Nowak *et al*., "Air Pollution Removal by Urban Forests in Canada and Its Effect on Air Quality and Human Health," *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening* 29 (November 2018): 40–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2017.10.019.

[10] Nigel Cooper *et al*., "Aesthetic and Spiritual Values of Ecosystems: Recognising the Ontological and Axiological Plurality of Cultural Ecosystem 'Services,'" *Ecosystem Services* 21 (2016): 218-29, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2016.07.014; Pernille Malberg Dyg, Søren Christensen and Corissa Jade Peterson, "Community Gardens and Wellbeing amongst Vulnerable Populations: A Thematic Review," *Health Promotion International* (2019): 1–14, DOI: 10.1093/heapro/daz067; cf. Geraldine Perriam, "Sacred Spaces, Healing Places: Therapeutic Landscapes of Spiritual Significance," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 36 (2015):19–33, doi 10.1007/s10912-014-9318-036; Kurt Jax *et al*., "Caring for Nature Matters: A Relational Approach for Understanding Nature's Contributions to Human Well-being," *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 35 (2018): 1–8.

[11] Chiara Tornaghi "Urban Agriculture in the Food-Disabling City: (Re)defining Urban Food Justice, Reimagining a Politics of Empowerment," *Antipode* 49, 3 (2017): 781-801.

now and in the future. This contestation generates in the protagonist of eco-justice the subversive will to determine the physical and social textures of the city as in "land reclamation, the rebuilding of urban commons, and self-governance".[12] The bottom line in this "critical urban gardening" is the quest to advance the culture of environmental justice over and against the commodification of the urban space by city planners and investors.[13]

Nevertheless, critical urban gardening tends to function in line with the cultural ethos of society. In neighbourhoods in the United States of America where racial distinction is endemic, underserved racial and gender groups like African-American women have no illusions about the socio-economically adversarial environment in which they function. In this awareness, a group of these women urban farmers in Detroit, Michigan, self-consciously "define themselves as activists and fight for causes such as food justice, prisoner's and prisoner's families' rights, community-based and citizens' education, digital justice, and environmental rights".[14]

In other less volatile social climes, where cultural distinctions are more subtle, urban farmers like those running Therapolis are no less ideologically conscious; however, they tend to be more culturally inclusive, making economic and social access to the good life the essential factor of contested dignity through urban gardening. Many gardens in Western Canada function within this paradigm. In this light, one can appreciate culturally

[12] Chiara Certomà, "Critical Urban Gardening," *Rachel Carson Centre Perspectives*, no. 1 (2015), 13–17; Chiara Tornaghi, "Urban Agriculture in the Food-Disabling City": 794.

[13] Certomà, 13.

[14] Monica M. White, "Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5, no. 1 (2011): 16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.13.

diverse urban farmers' participation in the Easter solidarity march with the underserved members of the city's downtown community.

Chiara Certomà captures the essence of critical urban gardening when she wrote:

> The sometimes modest or unnoticed—but always-enthusiastic—work of critical urban gardeners is helping to change post-modern urban life. Abandoned spaces and previously unnoticed wastelands become public places of civic renaissance. Producing food and helping interstitial nature to flourish is a way of helping people to meet basic life goals. The project provides adequate and nutritious food, a large, unpolluted space for personal and social enjoyment, and an equal opportunity to advance positive social relationships in one's own space.[15]

The overall effect of the various experiences of urban gardeners is that human physical, economic, social, and mental well-being are impacted positively in their interaction with nature.[16] The studies above show that urban gardens provide participants with the opportunity to engage actively with nature and, in the process, gain mastery over their socio-economic and mental health. This evident integral connection between the ecological flourishing of the environment and human wellness is a theme eco-theologians Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway have emphasized in recent decades.[17]

4.2.3 What Is Left to Study?

While the value of community gardens has been studied over and again, and their use is increasingly being incorporated into the rehabilitative work of human service agencies, social and medical, the foundational dynamics involved in how these gardens contribute to human welfare have not been given adequate attention. How does the

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[15] Chiara Certomà, "Critical Urban Gardening": 17.

[16] Joan Twiss *et al*., "Community Gardens: Lessons Learned from California Healthy Cities and Communities, *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 9 (September 2003): 1435-38; Donna Armstrong, "A Survey of Community Gardens in Upstate New York"; Bethaney Turner, "Embodied Connections".

[17] Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway, "Ecology and Theology of Nature," *Concilium* 5 (2018): 44-54; Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

physical action of gardening translate into the well-being of the gardeners? What personal or external resources assist them to bridge the chasm between physical exertion, socialization, and environmental ambience, on one hand, and the mental or spiritual change they desire, on the other? Most studies have acknowledged the impacts of community gardening on the gardeners, but the process of change, which varies from person to person, tends to be lost in these studies. As significant individuals questing for the good life, it matters how this process works in the gardens. Moreover, understanding the process may be significant for our theological understanding of the total ecological environment.

4.3 Therapolis Gardens: The Setting of the Study

Therapolis is a peri-urban forest-gardening community established by Cliff and his partner, Marianna, some ten years ago in Western Canada. Cliff had been a successful vegetable farmer, and he had purchased the land, once owned by his father Rick, on the bank of a regional waterway that served early European explorers, missionaries, and traders who first came into the country in the 17th century. Europeans traded with the indigenous people at one of the strategic locations on the river, and it became the centre of trade and colonial administration. The city grew to become a major urban centre. With the flourishing of business and trade, the city became cosmopolitan as it attracted more people seeking life's nurturing prospects.

Cliff's religious heritage is the Christian tradition, his father being a post-world-war European Christian immigrant. He also, as is evident in his work as a farmer, inherited from his father a sense of social justice. Rick was first exposed to the economic situation of the world's majority when he was named in the 1970s among the

ambassadors of his church tradition to tour sections of the global South—Africa, South America, and Asia—to prospect for mission partnership. According to him, it was his first time seeing poverty in contrast to the quality of life in North America. It was a conversion experience for him as he committed himself to a more humane approach to life and his livestock farming. At a time when the world was coming to terms with the linkage between worldwide poverty and environmental degradation, Rick aligned himself with the social justice movement in his city of domicile and, today, annually in Spring, he and Cliff can be seen in the solidarity procession against poverty and homelessness.

Marianna and Cliff first met in Cuba at one of the annual training sessions on permaculture, an eco-friendly organic farming method. The affinity of mind and interests brought them together again at one of the yearly Spring solidarity processions against poverty in their city. They both set up Therapolis to serve the disadvantaged members of the city.

Beyond serving as an early gateway into the country for Europeans, the natural waterway around them had had a more exploitative history of human activities. Over the years, as the city expanded along the waterway, its resources were harvested in lumbering and stone quarrying from its bed. By and large, flora and fauna were impacted by human activities. In recent years, with the increase in human population and the need for housing, the activities of "developers" are pushing out farmers from the city, thereby encroaching further on the natural landscape watered by the river. A collateral effect is that the commodification of land in the city is rapidly displacing agricultural activities around the city, the major skill post-war Europeans brought to the country. Today, it is

increasingly becoming a tough battle to keep away big monies from altering the natural environment of the waterway and its flood plains.[18]

In setting up Therapolis, Cliff and Marianna assumed an ideological position in the global struggle between environmental sustainability and consumerism.[19] The former seeks to preserve the ecological environment in the belief that its resources are meant to be appropriated sustainably; that is, to meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".[20] Environmental sustainability is anchored in the belief that the resources of the environment are meant to serve not only human material needs but the overall wellness of all living beings in the global ecological matrix, both now and in the future.

On the other hand, consumerism is a product of the ideas of the British philosopher Herbert Spencer, who conceived liberty as a free market unrestrained by the government, a situation which makes possible unlimited progress. Its underlying presupposition is that the resources available in the environment are inexhaustible.

Like every environmental movement of our time, and in its bid to protect its sector of the waterway, Therapolis functions at the nexus of this ideological tension.

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[18] The same trend is at work in Western Canada's rural communities and, in fact, worldwide, as Nettie Wiebe indicated in her June 2018 presentation, "Land Values and Living Values," at the Chester Ronning Centre, University of Alberta, Camrose Campus, Alberta. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ca_m336JnY4.

[19] Monica M. White, "Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5, no. 1 (2011): 16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.13; Chiara Tornaghi and Chiara Certomà (eds), *Urban Gardening as Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Nathan McClintock, "Urban Agriculture, Racial Capitalism, and Resistance in the Settler-colonial City," *Geography Compass* 12, no. 6 (June 2018): 1-16. https://www.switzernetwork.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/mcclintock_2018_geography_compass.pdf.

[20] United Nations, "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future," 1987. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf.

Happily, its management successfully presented a political representation to the powers in the city to spare it from man-made intrusions in the name of development. To strengthen this eco-friendly position and preserve its ecological value into the future, Therapolis is now secured in a perpetual conservation easement.

The management of Therapolis indicates that the objective for setting up the community garden is to provide the opportunity for persons experiencing obstacles in developing "adequate health and wellness". This is being done in collaboration with human service agencies who see value in incorporating, into the recovery regimen of their clients, regular interactions with nature through agricultural activities. Over the past few years, Therapolis has become a place where persons seeking connection with nature and clients of various human service agencies visit weekly to work on the agricultural land and experience hope amid the hard-nosed demands of modern life in Western Canada.

Diverse groups bring clients with their different needs, especially in mental health recovery, food security, and immigration settlement. Although the agencies are human service organizations, their character and objectives are diverse: rehabilitative, correctional, supportive, and therapeutic. Individuals also find Therapolis a place to contribute weekly services to give back to the city that offers them opportunities for livelihood by volunteering to harvest vegetables for the city's Food Bank. But the question remains: Does the biotic environment in which human and non-human beings coexist have value beyond its material offerings for human survival, as Nigel Cooper *et al.* posit?[21]

[21]Nigel Cooper *et al*., "Aesthetic and Spiritual Values of Ecosystems: Recognising the Ontological and Axiological Plurality of Cultural Ecosystem 'Services,'" *Ecosystem Services* 21

These idiographic studies are investigation into how the lived experience of the clients of the agencies using Therapolis Gardens provide the answer to this question. Specifically, they are interested in the dynamics responsible for those experiences of change reported by the disadvantaged persons gardening there in community. It is also my hope that their lived experiences will shine a light on the value of God's creation for comprehensive human well-being and offer insights into a practically demonstrable Christian eco-theology from the heart.

4.4 Conclusion

Urban community gardening has its roots in human intuitive response to needs: the need for food security and the need for safety in run-down urban neighbourhoods. It is a product of human concern for the dignity of their fellow human beings. And although its value emerged from this basic human instinct, community gardening is now courting the interest of religious communities engaging in it from faith perspectives.[22] Yet, while progress is being made in Christian traditions, especially in appreciating humanity's responsibility to care for the environment, the attitude of many is still one of detachment and a perception of the ecological environment as a resource bank for human consumption. On the contrary, extant literature on what has been studied indicates that the ecological environment that serves as the matrix in which we humans flourish is more than a commodity bank from which we merely draw material resources for our temporal needs. Our comprehensive wellness is integral to its health.

(2016): 218-29, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2016.07.014.

[22] See: Christine Sine, *Creating a Faith Based Community Garden* (Seattle, WA: Mustard Seed Associates, 2015), 6, 7; J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014,) 164.

Fig. 1: Relationship between Community Gardens and Wellness[23]

This is a study on the human utilization of the ecological environment through active engagement, what Bethaney Turner calls "embodied connections", to bolster the ongoing comprehensive wholeness of the clients of human service agencies.[24] Drawing from this approach, the research seeks to broaden Christian religious communities' understanding of the intrinsic value of the ecological environment for human flourishing beyond the growing awareness of human stewardship for the natural world. This

[23] Victoria Egli, Melody Oliver and El-ShadanTautolo, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing," *Preventive Medicine Reports* 3, (June 2016): 351.

[24] Bethaney Turner, "Embodied Connections"; Jena C. Webb *et al*., "Tools for Thoughtful Action: The Role of Ecosystem Approaches to Health in Enhancing Public Health," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (November/December 2010): 439-41.

broadening of perspective seeks to promote a more committed response to the ecological environment.

Chapter 5

Research Methodology

This is qualitative research, and the methodology chosen for the study is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Qualitative research methodologies place a premium on people's lived experience and meaning-making rather than seeking to verify preconceived theories or draw on them to understand the cases at hand. Therefore, this research takes the lived experience of the participants seriously in their gardening activities at Therapolis and the meaning they attach to them.

IPA is not a philosophy but a research methodology founded on the philosophical thoughts of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger on the fundamental principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography,[1] placing a premium on meaning-making at two levels. At the primary level, it focuses on the meanings participants make of their experiences through self-interpretation. At the secondary level, it focuses on the series of overarching meanings the researcher identifies as characterizing the various experiences of the participants. This double hermeneutics is the hallmark of IPA as developed in psychology.[2]

The ecological environment, which is at the heart of this research, is a macro sphere of diverse experiences of human and non-human elements interacting together. The perceptions and responses of the interacting elements to the stimuli in the environment depend on several complex factors of individual characteristics, the stability

[1] Jonathan A. Smith and Isabella E. Nizza, *Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2022), 7-8.

[2] Igor Pietkiewicz and Jonathan A. Smith, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Qualitative Research Psychology," *Psychological Journal* 20, no. 1 (2014), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263767248_A_practical_guide_to_using_Interpretative_Phenomenological_Analysis_in_qualitative_research_psychology.

of the environment, and the prospects of self-realization, among others. For the human elements, it becomes more complex as cultural and historical experiences become significant factors in response. The consequent diversity of individual experiences brought into the community garden environment necessitates a research methodology that takes seriously the diversity of these experiences, hence my use of IPA.

Moreover, unlike methodologies that hinge on just verbal expressions or a series of questions on questionnaires, IPA draws meaningfully from the spoken and unspoken experiences of individuals. Its interest in existential questions and experiences makes it valuable in plumbing the depth of human experience, hence my utilizing it as a methodology that will yield the insights this study seeks, that is, *how* individuals experience holistic change from community gardening as a form of interaction with the ecological environment.

The next chapter looks at the literature on community gardening and Christian ecological thinking to appreciate the states of both studies. Both community gardening and Christian ecological thinking are linked in their interests in human interaction with the ecological environment, the former being already in active engagement with it and the latter being in active consideration of its value for theological thinking and praxis. The study expects the lived experience of participants in community gardening to enlighten Christian theology and uncover insights into the value of the ecological environment beyond its ecosystem services[3] and motivate responsible Christian action in our age of global ecological crisis.

[3] "Ecosystem services are the direct and indirect contributions of ecosystems to human well-being." See: Earthwise Aware, "What are Ecosystem Services?" https://www.earthwiseaware.org/what-are-ecosystem-services/.

5.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

John and David Creswell define qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."[4] Discountenanced by public agencies, service providers, and planners for nearly half a century in favour of the quantitative method, contemporary postmodern society is increasingly appreciating the complexity of reality. Hence the systematic recognition of the qualitative research method, a process that began in the field of education and has found expression in other fields.[5] This realization is increasingly endearing qualitative research methods to planners and is consequently opening creative approaches to research in the humanities. The dynamic responsible for this development is close at hand.

The emerging complexity of global culture calls for versatile research methodologies to which the qualitative approach has proven amenable. Moreover, the increasing social awareness of repressed and underserved peoples and their quest for justice and inclusion in service provision have necessitated the incorporation of their subjective experiences and perspectives in research that is meant to serve their needs. Among the emerging research paradigms in this respect is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

IPA was developed in health psychology to arrive at the sense individuals make of their world and experience and the meaning they attribute to the events, or phenomena, in

[4] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 4.

[5] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 31; LeAnn G. Putney *et al*. "Evolution of Qualitative Research Methodology: Looking Beyond Defence to Possibilities," Reading Research Quarterly, 34, no 3(July/August/September 1999): 374**.**

which they are involved. It has fittingly been used to explore health, social, and clinical psychology, where there is the need to discern and uncover people's significant experiences "that frequently go unobserved or unexamined in daily life".[6] IPA has also been used in counsellor education.[7]

IPA acknowledges the dynamic nature of research by affirming the role of the researcher, not as a detached, objective inquirer but also as a contributor to the sense-making encounter from their perspective on the participant's experience. This is because IPA does not recognize the possibility of the researcher's complete detachment from their biases in perceiving and interpreting the phenomena being expressed by the participant. Rather, it foregrounds those biases and strives to bracket them out in its interpretative activities. Essentially, therefore, the researcher seeks to understand how the participants are making sense of their experiences and, at the same time, aims to make sense of the participant's meaning-making. IPA is, therefore, a double engagement in empathic and critical hermeneutics. In the former, the researcher stands in solidarity with the participant. In the latter, the researcher seeks, in context, to make sense of the participant's meaning-making.[8]

IPA originated from the two old phenomenological approaches to qualitative inquiry—the transcendental and hermeneutic approaches. Its third component, idiography, is its uniquely added approach to doing research.

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[6] Raissa M. Miller and Casey A. Barrio Minton, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: A Contemporary Phenomenological Approach," Counsellor Education Faculty Publications and Presentations, Boise State University January 1, 2016. https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1111&context=counsel_facpubs.

[7] Miller and Minton.

[8] Jonathan A. Smith and Virginia Eatough, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology*, edited by Evanthia Lyons & Adrian Coyle, (London: Sage Publications, 2011), DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446207536.

The three components derive from the ideas of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is concerned with the ways individuals experience events or phenomena and distinguishes them one from another. It focuses on how they perceive the experiences and verbally express them. This approach differs from the preoccupations of empirical tradition that seeks to know things as they are in themselves rather than as they are experienced.[9]

Heidegger deepened the hermeneutical dimension of phenomenological research. Being concerned with the question of existence, he argued the need for the researcher to understand the mindset of the one experiencing a phenomenon and the language in which they communicate that experience to interpret it. IPA thus recognizes the complexity of the research encounter as a combination of the participant's "cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state".[10] These are the elements of Heidegger's ontological concerns, which shape the participant's meaning-making. By implication, the making of meaning is rooted in individual beings, and the researcher must decode the participant to understand and interpret their experience of events.[11]

The two interpretations of the individual experiencing and expressing a phenomenon and the researcher decoding the experience in context constitute the double

[9] Igor Pietkiewicz and Jonathan A. Smith, "A Practical Guide to Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Qualitative Research Psychology," *Psychological Journal* 20, no. 1 (2014): 8, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263767248_A_practical_guide_to_using_Interpretative_Phenomenological_Analysis_in_qualitative_research_psychology.

[10] Jonathan A. Smith and Virginia Eatough, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology*, edited by Evanthia Lyons & Adrian Coyle, (London: Sage Publications, 2011), DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446207536.

[11] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide to Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Qualitative Research Psychology": 7.

hermeneutics of IPA. Moreover, the integration of both transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology in IPA results in "a method which is descriptive because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and interpretive because it recognizes there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon".[12] In fact, the interpretation of a phenomenon is a product of the "living-ness" of the one experiencing it.

The framework of existentialist philosophers, especially Merleau-Ponty, is also co-opted into the philosophical underpinning of IPA. This includes "existential meaning [of the participant's experience]; …the constant interaction between participant and context; and …the emphasis on historical, contextual, and political forces on participants".[13] In essence, IPA is mindful of the real world of the participant – both objective and subjective – in the attempt to understand the realities that inform their hermeneutics of experience.

The concern with the participant's existential meaning and context informs the third component of IPA, idiography, following transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology. Idiography is the in-depth examination and analysis of individual experience in its specific context. This prioritizing of personal experience over other research methods that seek to identify trends in large demographic settings sets IPA apart. The idea is to study every individual experience or case in detail before drawing

[12] Raissa M. Miller and Casey A. Barrio Minton, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: A Contemporary Phenomenological Approach," Counsellor Education Faculty Publications and Presentations, Boise State University, January 1, 2016, https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1111&context=counsel_facpubs.

[13] Miller and Minton.

overarching inferences, which may reflect convergence or divergence across cases of participants.

The idiographic nature of IPA implies that its strength is not in the size of participants involved but in the richness of the data they yield. The sample of inquiry will therefore be informed by several factors such as the depth of the researcher's analysis of individual experience, the "richness" of each case, the researcher's own level of intended conversation across cases, in a comparison and contrasting of them, and the restrictions occasioned by time, access to potential participants, and the prevalence of the subject of inquiry in context.[14]

5.2 IPA Research at Therapolis

Carrying out this IPA inquiry at Therapolis was preceded by three months of my participation in the garden's activities alongside the potential participants. It was clear from the beginning that Alberta's short farming season would require that decisions on data collection procedures be made while potential participants still visited the garden. The stage for engaging the participants was set by my required submissions and the guidelines provided by the University of Alberta Ethics Review Board (REB). This also quickly brought to the fore the need to firm up a decision on my demographic target: sample size; agencies that would be involved; access to and communication method with participants; conversation primer questions; contract agreement, spelling out the rights and prerogatives of the participants; and the obligations of the researcher. By the end of July 2021, these aspects firmed up along with the invitation posters and letters seeking permission from the agencies responsible for the potential participants.

[14] Igor Pietkiewicz and Jonathan A. Smith, "A Practical": 9.

5.2.1 Enlisting Participants

The Permission to enlist and interview potential participants was sought from three agencies: Resurgence, New Life and Life Promoters. All three operate from different locations in the city's downtown neighbourhood. As approved by REB, letters and posters were forwarded to the managements of the agencies through their garden coordinators. Potential participants were encouraged to enlist with the researcher via his phone number. Eventually, the agency garden coordinators suggested participants to the researcher while Therapolis program director nudged a few to step forward.

Participation was opened to adult gardeners, irrespective of gender or ethnicity, who were willing to share their lived experiences in the gardening community. Those who had participated in the garden for a minimum of one year were given priority of inclusion. The rationale for inclusion or exclusion is that adult participants are more likely to be intentional in participating consistently in the gardening activities recommended for them by their sponsoring agencies. Since they voluntarily participate in this aspect of their recovery programs, their consistency may indicate their appreciation of the experiences of being in the garden. Moreover, the short planting and harvesting season in Alberta does not allow for time to fruitfully engage underage participants in the garden.

Gender consideration was made on a liberal basis to enrich the data. Opening the research to all genders may yield different value perspectives since gender is not just about sexuality but is also a way of being. Hence, I considered the diversity of gender in data collection as having the potential to enrich the discourse on gardening and wellbeing. Although efforts were made to enlist non-western Canadian immigrants, the

perceived formality around invitation and documentation, as requested by the REB, appears intimidating. A team of young men who could have furnished one or two non-western participants were in their first season in the garden.

The idiographic nature of IPA necessitates a small sample for in-depth analysis; hence the goal of sampling was set at five. However, given the possibility of participants withdrawing their commitment after the interviews, enlistment was set at seven. The extra two were to make room for the case of withdrawal. Eventually, seven participants were interviewed: three women and four men. Two of the women were longstanding volunteers in the garden. One had retired from service with a human service agency in downtown and is familiar with the world of the participants in and outside the garden; the other had been a consistent volunteer with one of the agencies, New Life, and had been accompanying their clients to the garden for upward of eight years.

5.2.2 Ethics of Engagement

To engage participants, persons who agreed to be part of the study were given an information letter and consent form in private sessions at Therapolis. These contain the proposed title of the research, the identity of the researcher and his ethics research supervisor, and the Research Ethics Board (REB) assigned identity number of the study. REB requires the researcher to make these available to intending participants should they need to authenticate the exercise. A few made inquiries with the program director of Therapolis.

The invitation letter also indicated the purpose of the study, what is expected from the participants, and the risks, discomforts, and benefits to them, if any. Other indications were the freedom to participate or not to, and even to withdraw consent after the

interview, the financial token that would accompany participation, and the researcher's promise to keep in utmost confidentiality their participation and the data they submitted. All the participants had these printed out and given to them alongside the consent form, at least one week before the interviews. At the interviews, they returned a signed copy of their consent forms.

The participants had no objections to having their names mentioned in the research; however, they were encouraged to suggest preferred pseudonyms. I assigned pseudonyms to those who did not suggest any. The three agencies to which they were connected were also assigned pseudonyms to protect the identities of both the research participants and the agencies to which they were connected.

5.2.3 Data Collection

Data collection in IPA research does not follow a prescribed pattern. Generally, however, there are two ways to collect data through interviews. A structured interview will strictly follow a set of questions the participants are expected to answer. This tends to be straight-jacketed. The same set of questions is asked in the same order across the cases of participants. While it renders the data collection pattern uniform and makes for easy comparisons, its straight-jacketed approach tends to limit the richness of data. A more popular approach is the semi-structured but in-depth interview that allows participants to respond to open-ended questions of "How" rather than "What". The semi-structured model allows participants to do much of the talking and tends to be more natural and revelatory. The quality of data and the length of interview are a function of

the state of the participant's wellness. Interviews are also informed by the expressiveness of the participants.[15]

Data collection for this study occurred in the late Summer and early Fall of 2021. Six interviews were held at Therapolis, while the last was held at a public location suggested by the participant involved after the garden had closed for the season. In the end, I settled for the five best interviews whose contents vary in depth and expression.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, and they were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents by using Otter voice meeting and real-time transcription. The transcribed outputs were corrected, and extracts were made from them. These extracts constituted the essential data for this IPA study.

5.2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

As in data gathering, data analysis in IPA may not follow rigid procedures if the context is allowed to shape the discourse between the researcher and the participants. However, this research follows generally agreed-upon approaches to data analysis among practitioners of IPA. There are three stages to this process, all culminating in the narration of the phenomenon observed.

5.2.4.1 Initial Readings of Individual Transcripts

The researcher immerses themselves in the data through iterative reading and re-reading of each transcript, recalling the mental ambience of the interview, and paying attention to the emphasis on language. The aim is to actively engage the data and do reflective journaling that allows the researcher to note his observations and reflections about the interview experience or any other thoughts and comments that have potential

[15] Jonathan A. Smith and Isabella E. Nizza, *Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2022), 14.

significance. The effort "examines semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level".[16] The concern is about noting how the participant communicates issues and the notes, at this stage, are free textual analysis. Some of the questions raised in the mind of the researcher may or may not find answers subsequently further down in the text or either prove irrelevant.

There are different comments that a close reading of the text will engender. At the basic level are the descriptive comments. These are notes that emerge from a facile reading of the data. They tend to capture the basics as the participant expresses their experience. Linguistic comments take note of how the participants are using language to communicate content and meaning such as "pronoun use, pauses, laughter, repetition, tone, degree of fluency [articulate or hesitant] …and metaphor".[17] They capture the life and rhythms in the participant's communication of their experience. The third category of comments is conceptual. They are the early precursors of interpretative activities as the researcher begins to engage the data at the abstract level.[18] Here the ontological realities of time, feelings, self-awareness or existence become subjects for understanding the participant.

5.2.4.2 Identifying and Labelling Themes

The second stage in interacting with the data is to develop emergent themes from the exploratory comments. These are concise phrases that indicate the conceptualization of ideas evident from the interview. The aim is to reduce the large data and exploratory notes into manageable units, and this "involves a recall of what was learned through the

[16] Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 83.

[17] Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 88.

[18] Smith, Flowers, and Larkin.

whole process of initial noting".[19] These themes are the first level in the "hermeneutic circle". They are interpretative because they constitute the researcher's emerging understanding of the participant's meaning-making, using their, that is the researcher's, own words, but remaining true to the context of the participant's narrative and experience.

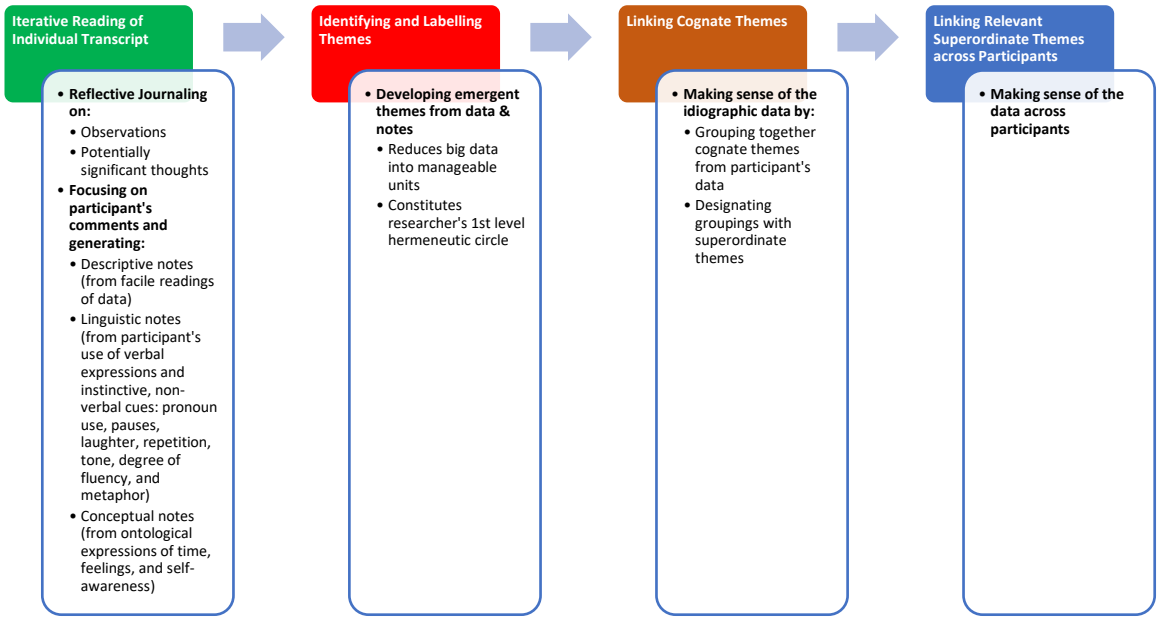

Fig. 2: Data Analysis Procedure

5.2.4.3 Linking Themes

The third stage in making sense of the data is to group the themes into thematic clusters according to conceptual similarities and label them accordingly. This will involve abstraction by identifying superordinate themes under which the themes are subsumed with short descriptions of each theme, using illustrative quotations. At this stage, the

[19] Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 91.

researcher is rearranging the data and is making the decision as to which themes are relevant to the research question, meaning some themes may be discarded.

It should be noted that the themes may not always converge to convey the same meaning; in fact, there could be divergence. Smith *et al.* believe that where the oppositional relationship between themes is evident, "this oppositional relationship may itself … offer a higher level organizing device for the analysis".[20] This process is repeated for each of the cases in the idiographical acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each participant in their world of experience and meaning-making.

5.2.5 Presentation of the Analysis

The researcher presents in narrative form the summary of each interview, incorporating relevant themes elicited from the data to convey a holistic context. Thomas Groenewald notes that "the aim of [the individual investigation] is the reconstruction of the inner world of experience of the subject".[21] This is because "each individual has his own way of experiencing temporality, spatiality, materiality, but each of these coordinates must be understood in relation to the others and to the total inner 'world'" of the participant.[22] This idiographic narrative of each participant's lived experience is anchored on their interpretation of their various experiences; however, IPA expects the researcher to carry the analysis a step further. The researcher will identify overarching themes that overlie the series of individual interpretations in a second layer of hermeneutics that binds together the entire lived experience of the participants.

[20] Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 97.

[21] Thomas Groenewald, "A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 3, no. 1 (2004): 51.

[22] Groenewald.

While the first level of interpretation begins with identifying emergent themes from the exploratory comments and pulling them together into cognate clusters under superordinate themes, the second level of interpretation emerges from overlapping superordinate themes. In tandem with the interpretative nature of IPA, there are three levels of interpretation that coincide with the three types of exploratory notes: the descriptive, the metaphorical and the conceptual. In this research, the interpretation of the participant's self-interpretation is guided by the hermeneutical circle of interaction between the text and its context. The hermeneutical circle presupposes that meaning is in context as the part inform the whole and the whole finds meaning in the parts. While IPA does not depend on theories to illuminate the lived experience of the participants, I have cautiously drawn from contextual social dynamics that may inform the reader's understanding of the participants' experiences.

For this research, I used the overarching themes that are common to the participants to inform a theology of the environment that places a premium, not so much on the legalistic relationship of accountability humans are expected to have in their use of nature's resources, but as an argument for the significant value of the world of nature for our theological rootedness.

5.2.6 Assessing Validity

Assessing validity in IPA follows the same criteria as in all qualitative research. Whereas quantitative research seeks empirically measurable data to predict psychosocial outcomes, believing that reality is independent of human experience, qualitative research is grounded on the presupposition that reality cannot be experienced independently of the human condition in specific environments. The socio-cultural and political contexts of

research, therefore, become factors that must necessarily weigh into our understanding of the phenomenon in view. Lucy Yardley has identified four criteria by which to establish the validity of qualitative research.[23]

The first criterion of validity is sensitivity to context. This criteria is demonstrated in this research through purposive selection of the participants with the active support and permission of the gatekeepers: the program coordinator at Therapolis and the management of the various human service agencies involved and their garden coordinators.[24] Moreover, the demographic criteria weighed in favour of those with at least a year of experience at Therapolis. However, the quest for gender parity in the selection ended up with the inclusion of women who themselves are not challenged in their mental health or by trauma but are long-term active volunteer participants alongside those who are so challenged. They brought into the investigation the fact that the value of community gardening for human well-being is not limited to those seeking recovery. It is valuable also for those seeking community in safe environments.

Sensitivity to the context is also indicated by the necessary criteria that informed the interview contract. This includes the voluntary nature of the participants' involvement, their freedom to withdraw at any stage within two weeks after the interview data has been shared with them, and the confidentiality of their data. Still, contextual sensitivity is demonstrated in the "interactional nature of the data collection".[25] I had been interacting with the participants in the garden months before the interviews, and

[23] Lucy Yardley, "Demonstrating the Validity of Qualitative Research," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 2, no. 3(2017): 295-96. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262624.

[24] Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, 180.

[25] Smith, Flowers, and Larkin.

there was evident trust in our interaction. The questions asked at the interview sessions were open-ended so they could freely express themselves.

Sensitivity to the data is also important to the integrity of the analysis. In this research, I have referenced the wider contextual dynamics that generate mental health challenges in a free market society, as put forward by Bruce Alexander, as they shed light on the social dynamics of urban communities and their residents. But this has been done without imposing them as "preconceived categories" that mutilate the data generated from the participants.[26]

The second criterion to ensure validity is the commitment to rigour or the thoroughness of the study. At the basic level, this approach involves the appropriateness of the sample to the questions asked and the level of attentiveness to the participants during the interviews, taking note of verbal and non-verbal cues, and following up with relevant questions in non-threatening ways. At a higher level, thoroughness involves in-depth engagement with the topic through data gathering and analysis. To this end, this research has focused on data connected to the experiences that brought the participants to Therapolis and how being part of the gardening community is of value to them. The application of the principle of the hermeneutical circle has also informed the analysis by ensuring that the interpretations of data in different domains of life experience are informed strictly by the entire context of gardening in the community. This rigorous focus has been applied to ensure the thoroughness of interpretation.

[26] Yardley, 295

Finally, thoroughness has been ensured in analyzing the data collected for this research by upholding the idiographic requirement of this IPA study. The uniqueness of each case has been respected without imposing the experience of one on the other.

The third component in ensuring the validity of qualitative research is transparency and coherence. I have ensured these by drawing my themes from the data and exploratory notes. These are organized under superordinate themes, composed of cognate themes with short descriptions and illustrative quotations from the data.

The final test of validity is the impact and importance of the research. While this study does not seek to establish a theory or universalize its outcome, the diverse lived experience of the individual gardener can indicate potential values of the ecological environment for human well-being beyond its materiality. The meaning-making inherent in their submissions can inform the emerging Christian eco-theology and practically ground it in the diversities of human experience in the ecological environment. This is a case of seeking to constitute theology with human experience, a much-needed ingredient to the ongoing efforts to stir Christian communities to appreciate the theological significance of God's creation.

5.3 Conclusion

As a methodology for unearthing human experiences that are unique to individuals, I have opted for IPA as my methodology. Its double interpretation of lived experience is based, not only on the verbal expressions of the interviewees but also on their non-verbal cues, making room for the subjective elements in the investigation. Although it is not used for theoretical generalization as in post-positivist research methodologies, its idiographic value presents an array of lived experiences in context.

This is my primary interest in the methodology. The researcher's overarching themes may then prove informative for understanding the phenomenon under study. This is the objective of the following four chapters in which the experiences of a group of gardeners at Therapolis serve as subjects of IPA investigation.

Chapter 6

Trevor: Gardening as Meditation[1]

6.1 Introduction

Trevor, who self-describes as a functioning alcoholic, is in his late 30s. A driven but amiable Caucasian Canadian, he had worked in one of the major industries critical to the economy of Western Canada. He left the industry after 20 years, twisted and broken. Trevor is not one to blame others for the outcome of his misadventures; nevertheless, he acknowledges the toxic nature of the work environment in which his stepfather placed him as a 16-year-old. He came to Therapolis as part of the regimen for his recovery and was determined to take full responsibility to unlearn the pathologies that trailed him throughout his career there. In his words:

> I've taken a step back … and realized all the negative things that they taught me. And I'm trying to weed those out of me at the moment, socially, individually. It was just a very toxic environment where it was about egos and selves, it was more achieving, achieving, and there's no credit. Like, you work as hard as you can set records. And nobody ever says good job, they just expect more. So, it's the more you give, the more they expect….

Beyond the social influences of competition and rivalry that are endemic to the job, Trevor reported the grueling physical challenges that came with it, which necessitated his consuming 120 tablets of Advil every two weeks just to work. “I'd wake up in the middle of the night with my arms seized. And I thought that was normal.” How could he have remained so long on a job he now looks on with disdain? Filial trust and the social landscape drummed him into thinking he was on the right path:

[1] The interview that produced this chapter was held on September 16, 2021, at the Therapolis Gardens.

> I didn't question it. It was good money, and society kind of tells you, you are making good money. You're a good person…. The thing is, I was never happy, and I just gave my money away, spent it on partying. And it was pretty much a waste of 20 years. And all I really have to show for it is negative behaviors and…problems that I'm dealing with now…."

The young fellow now on a personal crusade to turn his life around came to his senses like the Biblical prodigal son when, "I lost everything. …And then at the very end, a traumatic series of events happened…. A girl took all the money out of my bank account. She drugged me. …When I woke up and realized my card's gone and looked on my phone, my money's gone." It was still a prelude to his woes, as pursuing justice would cost him his job. Years of unhappy money-making ended when his stepfather passed away:

> I was on a downward spiral…of drinking, drinking, and drinking; drinking my sorrows away. Finally, everything came to a head within three days. And it was, I think, God or something, stepping in and saying you've had enough small chances. Here you go. And it's funny that losing all that stuff inspired me to recovery. But now that I'm in recovery and have well-being and understand what that looks like, I don't want all that stuff. So, the stuff that encouraged me was losing all the material items. And then now that I'm better, I don't want that [giggling].

The paradox of losses inspiring a new course of life and the growing recovery from alcoholism induced by unattainable success is producing a repudiation of the past. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of "I don't want that" is illuminated in context when the denunciation of his former work environment is foregrounded. In attributing his unhappiness to that environment, Trevor places in tension the perceived values that drive the industry and the new ones he seeks to cultivate by participating in the gardening activities at Therapolis. He expresses his commitment to reinvent his life with the

metaphor of "weeding out" the inimical results of the intense drive for material achievements that propel the industry in a typical free market society.

It appears, in this personal crusade to turn over a new leaf, that Trevor is deprecating the social impacts of his former work environment by employing the metaphor of the unwanted weeds that undermine fruitfulness in the garden environment. Alongside another descriptor, "toxic", he indicates his evident revulsion for the lifestyle that brought him to the brink. His commitment to ongoing personal reformation is conveyed clearly in this metaphor and description representing the social spoilers and undesirable encumbrances of his former workplace: the rabid competition and inhumane exertion that undermine a sustainable lifestyle like toxins do living organisms. Stepping back from his formerly damaging lifestyle to reclaim his self now allows him the opportunity to plumb the depth of past devastations and place the finger at the roots of his crisis: "I didn't really pick to go to the [field]. My stepdad...forced me."

The question of time remains in Trevor's unflattering perception of his former work environment and his now promising mental outlook. When did he come to terms with that environment's "negative behaviors and…problems that I'm dealing with now"? It is possible his decision to withdraw opened for him a critical perspective on that supposed *Eldorado* where he spent two decades of his young life. For he was aware of the need to change something about himself, hence his earlier false start towards recovery which made him conclude that, "it's not just about drinking, there's much more to it". It is also possible that his experience of physical exhaustion from the high-pressure vocation in which he found himself brought him to his senses.

While the sequence of these two possibilities is not immediately discernible, that is whether his evaluation of his former job environment came from his experience on the job before or after his own discernment of character flaws, it is certain that he can now draw a clear distinction between his life on the job and his state of mind after the job. While he was on the job, “the job twisted me to become what it is. And it wasn’t who I was to start with. But I became that”. In essence, it was the job that undid his real character; hence, having successfully extricated himself from it, he could look back and say “that job, my core values, none of it was in my comfort zone, or who I was. I'm a kind, generous, caring person, I'm loving, creative, and it took all that.... The job was not for me”. Recovery, for him, will be the renewal of these virtues cold money-making nearly stamped out.

Trevor was in his second season in the garden in 2021, although his journey to recovery began much earlier with human service agencies. Nevertheless, it is interesting that he recognizes that he is making progress in his quest for transformation. “At the moment,” he is weeding out undesirable negativities that had accrued within him. And “now that I'm better”, his value orientation has changed. Before “now” the weeds had almost choked up his life, but in his emerging new life “I've been sober for 15 months now. I get to do wonderful things, become a gardener; things I didn't even know existed.” New confidence arises from walking the path to “recovery” alongside the discovery of gardening as a “wonderful” engagement. Experience in gardening has opened a new, contrasting vista indicating the radical difference between pre-recovery life experience and the emerging future possibility in gardening.

Themes	Page, Line	Key words
Perceived Qualities of the Garden		
Providential laboratory	7.28	like a godsend, practicing mindfulness
Appreciating nature	8.4	to appreciate nature
Accentuating the real	8.8	focus on what's real
Productivity in Human-Nature synergy	9.23	satisfaction of harvesting
Nature as a text for meditation	11.9	being out here is its own meditation
The permanence of nature	17.28	plants and animals…will always be here
Engendering gratitude	18.26	builds feelings of gratitude
Transformation Dynamics		
An exciting place	8.1	a magical place
Quietening and sobering	8.8	quiet that noise
Subtle connecting	8.25	a connection I never understood
Multiple connections to people & nature	9.15	connected to mother nature, roommates
Diverse learning	9.28	always something interesting
Opportunity to cultivate new values	10.4	volunteering was something
Connection to the source of nourishment	18.25	it really connects you
Integration into Community		
Opportunity for community	7.31	just a community
Service oriented people	8.15	here to give back
Respectful community	8.16	there's no pressure
Unburdening community	8.18	no expectation; it's lighter
Humane and dignifying community	8.19	It's more humane
Relationship bonding	11.10	I feel a stronger connection
Inspiring leadership	12.20	listening...and looking…is inspirational
Affirmative community	13.7	made us feel special
Contagious conviviality	15.13	if I'm happy…I make other people happy
Impacts of Participation		
Experience		
Ineffable empowerment	8.9	can't explain the power
Rekindled pastime	10.23	now I go fishing
Awakened consciousness	10.26	seeing what was always there
Calming experience	10.27	it's soothing
Value transformation	12.3	I'm doing it for free
Emotive end of season	13.22	it was just a wonderful time
Consistent commitment	13.29	keep your focus
Sympathetic growth	14.17	seeing nature and taking influence
Positive self-retuning	15.7	a chance to step back
Comprehensive wellness	17.1	it's got almost everything…
Meaning		
Fulfillment in relinquishment	10.10	not about myself but it helps myself
Service as purpose	11.28	It feels like a purpose.
Emotive feeling of achievement	12.17	something to give back to others

Table 1: Themes Generated from Trevor's Interview

There is another dimension to Trevor's awareness of the dynamics at play in his life's journey. At a cursory glance, it would appear he came to his senses in the aftermath of the social trauma he experienced on the job, more than through the inherent physical challenges. He did not seem to find the physical exertion the job demanded unbearable so long as he could relieve the pain with over-the-counter medication. His pressing concern was the social trauma that came with the job. However, he confesses that he experienced a providential intervention, the expression of which seems to fail him to confidently express beyond, "I think, God or something, stepping in and saying you've had enough small chances." Yet, it is not clear what those small chances are. Are they the risks in dissipation? The risks in unwholesome associations? What makes the chances small? The narrowness of his escapes from potentially fatal harm? Irrespective of the dynamics at work in his waking up to reality, Trevor takes responsibility for unlearning the pathologies that have accreted in him due to his former work environment.

Taking responsibility eventually led him to Resurgence, a residential treatment centre for addiction, after a short-term initiative in a similar institution. Resurgence runs a structured program in mindfulness to assist willing clients and supports this in-house effort with the encouragement to the clients to volunteer their services in the garden. If addiction directs the self inwardly, community gardening draws it out, hence its incorporation into the recovery regimen of those who are willing to be involved as a non-threatening process of reincorporation into wider society. Although Trevor hardly completed high school, he found the training in mindfulness at Resurgence stimulating, as when he reflected on his contribution to the garden community. He quickly recalled that "selfless action is where fulfillment is obtained" and quipped with gratification,

“That’s what the Tao Te Ching speaks of. I really like using philosophy.” He is upbeat about his new life.

6.2 Perceptions of the Garden

Having quit formal schooling in his teenage years, the most relevant learning Trevor brings to the garden comes from his mindfulness training. Mindfulness training tends to go together with raising consciousness about personal well-being and the need to balance personal growth in the various domains of life. Usually represented graphically by a wheel, the domains of human wellness range from six to eight, depending on the school of thought prevailing in the teaching context. It does not take Trevor much to see the value of his participation in the garden from the viewpoint of a learner of human wellness, concluding that the garden as a one-stop location for acquiring comprehensive wellness. In his words:

> This place does offer one of the things in the mindfulness program, the heart of Resurgence speaks of wellness. We all are physical, spiritual, mental… this place… it's got almost everything on that wheel. Like, it's for me, spiritual. Nature is spiritual for me. You get in a physical workout; mentally, the girls add the information, and you're mentally stimulated. it's everything a person needs in one place.

According to the nature of his former job, Trevor did not function in a synthetic office environment but in the wild. Although he was surrounded by mother nature, whose heart was being bled daily for the black gold, it made no impression on him. The commodity view of the product he was working on apparently numbed his capacity to appreciate his natural environment. He was doing what his job required of him as a man of modernity. However, on coming into the garden after the perceived hollowness of his former career and lifestyle, he developed a new awareness of the natural environment. He

sees the opportunity the garden offers as a Godsend, being a place to practice his "mindfulness stuff". The garden is not only a laboratory for practicing mindfulness; "as a magical place," it also gives him a chance at another way of collaborating with other people in mutual learning:

> You learn as you work together with people. It really aided and gave me time to appreciate nature, like when you're in the city and these programs, it's go, go, go, go, go, get goals, get goals. Coming out here is a chance to quiet that noise and just focus on what's real instead of society's façade.

At work, he had been in a state of "detachment from society, and just being in that small environment working with the same five guys. And everybody's just trying to compete against each other." Now, subconsciously lumping the crass ethos of his former out-of-town work environment with the city environment, he contrasts the garden environment with both. The former out-of-town work environment, though forested, shares the same values and spirit with city life, both being informed by intemperate modernist economic philosophy. "Everybody is out there trying to line their pockets. And it's all about more, the whole mentality of more and more and more." Hence, he sees the values of popular culture as a façade for opportunism and greed.

In contrast, the garden environment nurtures selflessness, voluntarism, respect and serenity:

> Out here, people are here for selfless reasons. They are here to give back. … and there's no pressure. There's no pressure. You come; you do what you can; there's no expectation; it's lighter. It's more humane. You don't feel like just a number. You just… you are; you're being out here instead of chasing something and… always running after something. So, it's a quieter thing. But it's a connection. It's a connection that I never understood.

Coming from a work background that he considers as having twisted his personality, Trevor finds an alternative community in the garden. Enraptured by his surprise discoveries in the magical, Godsent laboratory for practicing mindfulness, he assumes everyone is motivated by the virtues taught by the Tao as he is. However, these virtues are not the contrasting reality to the superficiality he observes in the popular culture of work and society. The world of nature is the contrasting reality. Pointing to the garden and its adjoining forest, he asserts unequivocally:

> …This is real. This was here before us. And now all the structures of man, and I'm getting super deviated [giggling]. It's all fake. It's all man-made. And that doesn't last forever, all those systems and everything. It's not real. This is real. These plants and animals and trees and stuff, they will always be here. It will always be here.

And so, in Trevor's emerging world, nature and its flora and fauna are the new reality. Their unlimited staying power trumps the fleeting and insatiable desire of society that has reduced its resources to mere commodities to be exploited at will. To focus on that reality as a text for "meditation" is to appreciate nature and accentuate its invaluable character and importance.

It is easy to miss the import of Trevor's rhetoric of the garden as a "fantastic," "magical" place. In fact, he used the superlative, "magical", four times within the first fifteen minutes of our conversation. He intuitively explains what he means when he says, "You get to see something that you work on go from nothing to something over a period of time and then you actually get the satisfaction of harvesting and seeing what mother nature has done. It keeps growing. It's life. It's magical." Science can explain the dynamics behind the output of this synergy between nature and humans, but beyond the rational explanation is a component that gives meaning to the interaction. Trevor calls it

life. This synergy is often recalled at the celebration of the Christian Eucharist, acknowledging in the elements the intersection of human labour and divine providence. Trevor's language may be secular, but his thinking is theological.

There is another perspective on time in Trevor's view of productive interaction between humans and nature. This is different from his awareness of the two periods of what his life was as a functioning alcoholic and what it is presently as a recovering addict. Time is understood here as a chronological periodization of life experience. However, he acknowledges that time is also a third component in successful gardening, for time and nature, in concert with human exertion, make possible the exciting experience of achievement and satisfaction. The student of mindfulness puts it this way:

> If I could take a lesson from out here. Well, how much care and love goes into this garden and then seeing how it comes. But you have to keep your focus in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. And then the fruits come. A lot of people like to put up stronger effort just in the beginning. And then sort of, at the end, they don't have as strong of an effort. And this shows you, you keep that good effort the whole way through. And then you get the carrots out of the ground.

This is Trevor's intimation that time in the garden is also a moment of opportunity, *kairos*, since gardening is a seasonal engagement. This concept of time is significant in gardening for the recovery of persons coming from addiction since it carries a sense of opportunity, disciplined focus, and patient waiting. It gradually draws the willing recovering addict into unobtrusive training in self-management, which is critical to personal flourishing in the dominant culture that understands time as a commodity.

6.3 Transformational Dynamics of the Garden

Therapolis is a practical field of human engagement with nature through gardening. Beyond the statutory requirement of safety measures for participants, the garden does not run a regimented program for them. This laissez-faire approach to managing participation creates an environment that sets into motion certain transformational dynamics that are shaping Trevor. Against the backdrop of his life's journey, he speaks of the place in the contrasting qualifiers of being both exciting and quietening. The marvel of nature at work in the garden is motivating, but the quiet growth and fruitfulness of the field and forest through the seasons are sobering. There is a deliberate contrast here.

Trevor's past work environment was one of clanging wheels, pulleys, and noisy machines. Productivity finds expression in evident activities, and achievement cannot but be an expression of conquest and invincibility. Thus, he was professionally programmed over the years to look for problems and dysfunctions in machines at work. This skill has become ingrained in his personality, making him to spend his energy on other people's problems as he notes:

> I was very goal orientated…and was always faster, faster, plan, plan. And my job…was to make sure nothing failed. So, my ears and my eyes were my most important tools to listen to sounds, listen to things. You walk into some of these houses, there's a million-dollar pump, bah, bah, bah, bah, bah, engines run into big, huge engines. And I can pick out of my ear a pump that had a loose bearing… just from a squeal. So, I predict negative things, and it's terrible…. And I see problems everywhere, because my brain is taught to see that I waste a lot of energy on other people's problems.

The garden environment represents everything Trevor's former job environment and its context of popular culture failed to live up to. Whereas activism was the virtue of

the job, gardening in community slows participants to live in the moment such that he reports that it “gives me a chance to step back.” The dividend is that “every time I leave this place, there's joy, there's happiness. My day is better.” The breather of weekly gardening reprograms Trevor’s mind and opens a new vista to continually engage with fellow gardeners in mutual affirmation.

This social affirmation results from the slow and quiet pace of activities in the garden, and Trevor calls it “a connection” he never understood when he began his recovery journey. He had been nice to people even in the days of his unhappy money-making, but “being a part of something that’s greater than myself, … that's huge”. His thought process was swamped in a competitive environment, and he could not have imagined another world the garden makes possible because “being out here … there's a lot of connections, I'm connected to the community, I'm connected to mother nature, I'm connected to my roommates, I'm giving back and something magical happens with all that connects.”

In the same vein, gardening connects him to his source of nourishment. In this sense of connection to nature, Trevor shoots beyond the conceptual to critique, though obliquely, the indifference of popular culture to nature’s nurturing support for humans. It is a “disposable” culture in which “nobody sees where the food comes from anymore.” And he asks rhetorically of the grocery store’s food, “How do you have gratitude or appreciation for what you're eating?” In contrast, his involvement in gardening gives him a different feeling about food:

> When you're out here and you get to pick it. And then you go home, and you make a salad and you're like I see where it came from, I see where it started, I know the work that went into it, your food tastes better just because you understand where it comes from. …So, it really connects you

> and builds feelings of gratitude and appreciation for mother nature which we need to survive.

The value of Therapolis to Trevor's ongoing recovery is rooted in his perception of the dynamics at work in the garden. The perception is shaped by the garden's ethos, which contrasts with the world he had known as a functioning alcoholic. His viewpoint may not be assumed to be an inevitable one since there are other participants and volunteers in the garden who may not be as upbeat about their involvement and may not be as philosophically enthused as he is. Apparently, his background lessons in mindfulness at Resurgence, which draws from the Tao Te Ching, has sharpened his mental reflexes to see his environment, past and present, in the light of the values of the Chinese religio-philosophical school. His presence in the garden is therefore more than the physical activities he shares with other participants and volunteers. For him, those activities are materials for meditation, as the garden has become his seasonal laboratory for practicing mindfulness. In his words, "being out here is its own meditation". If his reason for coming to the garden is to give back to society as taught in mindfulness, the garden is leaving its quietening, sobering, and connecting ethos of change on him, but his ultimate takeaway is gratitude for the nurturing gifts of mother nature.

6.4 Integration into Community

Drawing from Eric Erikson, Bruce Alexander argues in *The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society* that addiction reflects the human quest for "psychosocial integration" in the bid to transcend the experience of dislocation. Psychosocial integration is "a state in which people flourish simultaneously as individuals and as members of their

culture."[2] According to Erikson, "it makes life bearable, even joyful at its peaks".[3] It is, therefore, instinctual for people to seek and nurture those relationships of "friends, school-mates, co-workers, and recreational, ethnic, religious, or nationalistic groups".[4]

Dislocation, the experience of being insufficiently integrated, undermines human flourishing and could be hard to endure, the reality of which is evident in its punitive use to ostracize and banish people from society in the earliest eras.[5] Alexander goes on to argue that the contemporary free market economy, which western societies have globalized, is a present source of dislocation for people because, "In order for 'free markets' to be 'free,' the exchange of labour, land, currency, and consumer goods must not be encumbered by elements of psychosocial integration…." They "'distort' the free play of the laws of supply and demand, and thus must be suppressed". In this vein, "people are expected to move to where jobs can be found, and to adjust their work lives and cultural tastes to the demands of a global market."

Alexander's perspective on the link between the free market economy and addiction through dislocation places in context Trevor's experience of alcoholism. Entering at age 16 a job that took him away from family and friends 20 days at a time and returning to a life on the go for another 10, it took him 20 years to realize how much damage the work and its social environment had done to his character:

> I went to the…field and worked extremely hard. … It gave me an excuse I can do whatever I want. And then the mentality of thinking that you're on another higher level than everybody else. But it's detachment from

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[2] Bruce K. Alexander, *The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society* (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2001), 3. http://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC_Office_Pubs/roots_addiction.pdf.

[3] Alexander, 4.

[4] Alexander, 3.

[5] Alexander, 4.

> society, and just being in that small environment working with the same five guys. And everybody's just trying to compete against each other.

When people find themselves dislocated from those significant relationships that give them meaning, Alexander noted, they "construct lifestyles that substitute for it." These "substitute lifestyles entail social relationships that are not sufficiently close, stable, or culturally acceptable to afford more than minimal psychosocial integration." This played out in Trevor as he was stuck with his crew of fellow competitors on a painfully demanding job. The social angst and physical exhaustion led him down the path of alcoholism:

> It was 20 years of getting charges, but it was one at a time and I just paid lawyers. I had the money. You just pay him. It was gone. I got into lots of trouble. But it was all always spread apart. And then at the very end, a traumatic series of events happened and within three days I lost everything.

The dysfunctional professional and social life were intensified by the loss of his stepfather, which sent him "on a downward spiral… of drinking, drinking and drinking, drinking my sorrows away." But he felt the need for companionship hence his account that he, "had a girlfriend you're trying to take care of her, the whole idea of community was nonexistent. You know, I was nice to people, but as far as helping out the guy and actually being a part of something that's greater than myself, you know, … that's huge." It is noteworthy that Trevor used the second person language in describing how he was making an effort to care for his friend, "you're trying to take care of her…". He seems embarrassed to admit the futility of his investment in the relationship that landed him in a series of terrible losses.

The loss of his first job and his relocation to another city inspired him to get his life together, and although he was intent on turning over a new leaf, he felt the need for a stable relationship to sustain his new life, a kind of life in community with a soulmate. Yet, to the contrary, the new job and the new friendship did not give him the stability he craved. The false start gave him anticommunity: resentment, bitter rivalry, and material loss:

> I got a year sober just by myself. And I got promoted at work…. Life is great. But the thing is, I worked with my girlfriend, and lived with her. So, 24 hours a day… and she resented me for getting the promotion. She was at the company for four years, I just got there for a month, and I get started running through. So, she was kind of jolted; it was a very toxic relationship. …The pressures mounted, and I went out, I started drinking again, I drank for two weeks, and lost everything again, we broke up, she got the house…, so I lost everything again.

When his search for help set him on the path to recovery and eventually brought him to the garden, Trevor noticed the qualitative difference between community and life on the go, and between "psychosocial integration" and its dangerous parody in the embrace of 'frenemies'. This background explains his perception of *community* at Therapolis, his first encounter with the concept having occurred before coming to the garden:

> When I first started my recovery journey, some of the sheets that they asked you to fill out were how do you feel? Or what is your connection to the community? That question absolutely stumped me. I have zero idea. And the other one is, like I didn't understand, because I've never had that connection. You know, I've been out in the bush for 20 days, and then at home for 10. And I had a girlfriend, you're trying to take care of her, the whole idea of community was nonexistent.

In explaining his moment of encountering the concept, Trevor confessed his lack of understanding, but he could recall relationships in his life that bordered on the idea: at

work, at home, his girlfriend, and the people to whom he had been “nice”. Even though some of these people were in a relationship with him, he can now look back to appreciate that something was missing. They did not fit into that “huge” idea called community. What makes it huge? He defines it as “something that’s greater than myself”. Until he was asked that question, his relationships outside his family were various forms of interested contestations. And irrespective of how nice he was to people, opportunism, bargains, and sense of entitlement ruled the harsh world of money-making and amorous relationships for him.

Mindfulness training eventually prepared him for a new value-orientation of self-giving, as he quotes the Chinese religious philosophy: “selfless action is where fulfillment is obtained.” His realizing this philosophy in his living experience may be attributed to his decision to volunteer in the garden. Happily, he finds it true because “out here, people are here for selfless reasons”.

As his understanding and experience of community formed, Trevor’s perception of community becomes more colourful. The garden is not only an exciting, magical place, but it also offers opportunities for mutual learning: “… it's just a community. You learn as you work together with people.” Moreover, it is a community of service-oriented people, respectful, unburdening, humane, and dignifying.

> There’s no pressure. You come; you do what you can; there's no expectation; it's lighter. It's more humane. You don't feel like just a number. You’re just… you are; you're being out here instead of chasing something and… always running after something. So, it's a quieter thing. But it's a connection. It's a connection that I never understood.

Coming from two decades of having to make way for himself against competitors at work and opportunists outside the work environment, it is significant for Trevor that he

was privileged to be among the few in the garden invited to take part in the closing fiesta of the 2020 gardening season:

> …We got invited for that. And I remember sitting there and we were the only group allowed to go because of the covid protocols. …They said that we were the favorite group. So, they chose us, so that made us feel special. A little bit more special. I remember that festival and seeing all the local bands and drummers and poets and stuff. …It was really interesting. There were about 100 dragonflies. They were just hovering over the crowd the whole time. And just seeing all the people that have worked together and my friends. And then seeing some of the people from Resurgence were performing and got some talents. It was a community. And the feeling was just warm and even with the covid restrictions and you know, spaced out seating, it was just a wonderful time. A nice, nice farewell to the year.

Trevor finds it affirmative to be so privileged. However, this valuation of the opportunity could also be a reflection on his past life. On one hand, it could be a manifestation of the old habit of a comparative sense of significance, which is usually rife in highly competitive environments. At a time when participation in the garden was highly restricted, being selectively invited to the closing ceremony of the season is significant and affirmative. Yet, the question remains: Is Trevor carrying over a residue of an old thought pattern?

On the other hand, could Trevor's sense of being "a little bit more special" be a subtle sign of drawing upon a source of healing for his past frustrations and losses? Certainly, a youthful lifetime of 20 years spent in dissipation could leave people with mental health challenges. Is Trevor's a case of finding meaning and consolation in a seemingly small privilege? Whatever informs his valuation of the invitation, the expressive display of talents at the occasion transcended, for him, the worldwide

rampaging plague of Covid-19 and brought the season to an end in the company of animated nature. “A nice, nice farewell to the year” has an aura of romantic melancholy.

In contrast to his pre-recovery life, the garden community offers him a new perspective on social relationships as a form of connection and the contextual resonance of hearts and minds in community. As if to demonstrate the community’s character, he says in a measured tone, “…being out here … there's a lot of connections, I'm connected to the community, I'm connected to mother nature, I'm connected to my roommates…”.

Beyond social bonding, sight and sound were also involved in Trevor’s instruction at Therapolis as he notes, “Just *listening* to Marianna [the program manager] and *watching* her and *seeing* how strong she is and how she's always thinking of how to better the experience and looking how to make it grow. It is inspirational.” Is this part of the meditation life in the garden affords him? This positive attentiveness to others’ generous efforts, in contrast to the competitive spirit of the past, demonstrates an emerging orientation towards the positive as he mentions that:

> Right now, I'm not trying to set goals or expectations. I'm just trying to be the best I can be. And I mean, I'm not sitting at home every day waiting for a miracle to happen. But you know, as long as I keep interacting and choosing the right things, and being positive, I think an opportunity will present itself to me. So, I'm giving that a shot.

Wrong choices and a toxic work environment damaged the past. Now, a new future is gestating for Trevor through the discipline of mindfulness and gardening in community. Healthy interactions, a positive mindset, and right choices are the present priorities to re-tune self and life.

6.5 Impacts of Participation

What evident changes does Trevor evince in consequence of his voluntary participation in gardening at Therapolis, what he calls “a chance to step back”? Perhaps the place to begin is his value reorientation. The training in mindfulness at Resurgence did not bring all the residents to the garden. It was optional, and Trevor opted for it. In his words, “I came here because I knew volunteering was something. I think it spoke to me because I have been working so hard and I’ve just been able to work for somebody else for no money. It's just this. I can't explain the power in it.”

It is not clear at what time he knew “volunteering was something,” but his immediate reference to the philosophy of the Tao indicates that that awareness came from his lessons in mindfulness. Yet, “I think it spoke to me” makes uncertain the motivation behind his volunteering. Did he come to it by intuition? Or is it part of the ongoing repudiation of the past and its negative memories? Any of these could inform a change in attitude after the trauma of losing everything. What is certain is that a new attitude of introspection is going on, deeper than the ephemerals that had governed his life for much of the past. The profundity of this transformation in consciousness is captured in his admission that “I can’t explain the power in it.”

Trevor chooses the community garden, Therapolis, as the place to express this ineffable experience. And he finds in the garden a new purpose: “Now that I know I can help the community. I really like it. It feels like a purpose. …Just being able to give back.” The leap in his value reorientation can be appreciated in his admitting that gardening was, “something that I used to hate doing…and now I’m doing it for free for

just giving back". Certainly, time in gardening is enlarging an awareness of possible directions to invest his energy, which he finds gratifying: "I really like that feeling".

The feeling of making a difference by giving back must be juxtaposed with his regret of missing the harvest in his first season in the garden: "I really like taking the carrots here. Last year, I missed it. I went up to my parents … and so I missed the harvesting. I was here all year and then missed the time. So, I didn't get to see the fruits of the labor, first day." Not seeing the fruits of the labour may not indicate entitlement, but it obviously indicates a natural desire to be gratified with the result of his invested efforts. His dream of what he could have done with his share of the harvest he missed might have been conveyed in his critique of society's alienation from the source of food production:

> When you're out here and you get to pick it. And then you go home, and you make a salad and you're like I see where it came from, I see where it started, I know the work that went into it, your food tastes better just because you understand where it comes from. When you're buying your lettuce at the grocery store, and you just put it in a bowl. You don't have the same appreciation for that piece of lettuce as one would have that's grown a lot of Sinhala been through every step. So, it really connects you and builds feelings of gratitude and appreciation for mother nature which we need to survive.

Nevertheless, the radical difference from the past is still demonstrated in Trevor's new value of self-giving through community gardening and a newfound love for "something I used to hate" like an average child of modernity who is enamored with the synthetic and the glamorous. What makes the difference is the blistering pain from past overexertion and losses, which separates the old lifestyle from the emerging one by provoking in him a soul search.

The emerging new life not only feels good, he also finds fulfilling the accompanying value of relinquishment as he reveals, “It's not all about myself. But you know what happens? It helps myself. Right? It's weird. Yes, selfless action is where fulfillment is obtained.” Here he introduces a paradox that acknowledges his involvement in the garden as a duty that is beyond his personal interests, but at the same time, it has value for “myself”. The old life where work and profit were about “myself” is giving way to a new one in which the self finds value in relinquishment. In a young western man, this value reorientation is countercultural, hence his qualifying it as “weird.” To the extent that it is at variance with the dominant culture in which he was formed, it is strange. In fact, this awakening of consciousness to another lifestyle is essentially Eastern, Trevor having been orientated to this by the philosophical teaching of mindfulness according to Tao Te Ching.

Is Trevor’s change real? The recovering alcoholic is of the view that it is real as he says, “it’s complete”. In his words:

> As a child, I enjoyed fishing and camping. And all this stuff, but working on the …, you're in the middle of the bush, but you don't appreciate it. And so, what I'm doing now is I go fishing like three or four times a week, and I'm out in the bush, but I appreciate it now. And it's seeing…what was always there.

Awakened consciousness and a return to a pastime with a new appreciation for what has always existed are collateral changes accompanying Trevor on his new journey. His attraction to this new appreciation of nature is that “just from watching it, it is soothing.” This valuation must still be tied to his mental awakening by the training in mindfulness and his experience of community in the garden. The contexts of awakened

consciousness and affirmative garden community set his new social environment apart from the old.

6.6 Conclusion

In Trevor's experience of reflective gardening, the enterprise serves him as a metaphor for personal growth. Overall, productive gardening is a metaphor for human flourishing. And, as in life, the consistent commitment of heart and soul to personal goals is the secret to attaining them, just as in the requirement for nurturing plants to successful harvests. In arguing a consistency of efforts, from the beginning to the end, "getting the carrots out of the ground", he submits that gardening is "comparative to life. Whatever you put your attention towards, and love, it will grow. And that's with anything you really do. So, seeing nature and taking influence from that is what I take from it".

Chapter 7

Sammy: Gardening for Re-entry into Society[1]

7.1 Introduction

Sammy, a Caucasian in his early 50s, was in the music industry as an entertainer for decades. Music took him to far-flung places where he saw "amazing things". His exposure to the entertainment industry led to an undisclosed addiction which eventually led to his seeking help at Resurgence. In responding to the inquiry on the nature of his addiction, he says:

> It was just a long-term consequence; it doesn't really matter what industry you're in. If you're going to fall down the rabbit hole, you're going, you're going anyway. But yeah, the entertainment industry. I was just in it for so long, like, you know, nightclubs for a decade, you know, touring for 15 years, and never being home. All that stuff contributes to the negative effects that can arise.

The unwillingness to disclose the nature of his addiction is reinforced by his second-person style of communication. It is possible that Sammy communicated in the second person language as a characteristic style, but it is also possible that the style reflects his struggle to own his past, which was not as tidy as what he now aspires to be as a businessman. Nevertheless, this analysis sees Sammy's second person subject as Sammy himself obliquely making sense of his experience in the garden. Irrespective of what may account for this clumsy style of self-expression, we find in Sammy's music career Alexander's posit of addiction resulting from the loss of psychosocial integration. His awareness of the negative influences that are integral to the soft environment of the

[1] The interview that produced this chapter held on October 15, 2021, outside the Therapolis Gardens.

entertainment industry drove him to seek help. In his characteristic second-person style of communication, he submits that:

> Once you become aware, then you have to take the next step, which is action. So, you take action, and you try to make sure that you're doing positive things… and it's just to continue to do positive things where if you get caught up in the negative cycles, then you're always doing negative things. And then you're always, as they say, deep in the do. And… it takes time to recover.

Sammy also notes that when the victim of addiction gets "really stuck in that negative cycle. It's hard …to find any kind of faith…. You really don't believe in anything." Healing must therefore include the recovery of a sense of transcendence. However, recovery for him is to get "to that spot where you can actually make some decisions that are good decisions, instead of a string of bad decisions, then you'll start to get more and more positive outcomes."

Sammy completed his time at Resurgence in 2020, but he kept to the weekly routine of visiting the garden as a volunteer in 2021 and looks forward to his third season in Therapolis in spring 2022. Although he is evasive about the nature of his past addiction, from all indications, he is presently upbeat about his future:

> I just finished a year and a half studying business. So, I'm looking to become more of a businessman than a laborer. And this is all just part of a long, long journey, say, I'm lucky…. And the main thing is, at this point, through Resurgence and through places like that, I'm very healthy now, which was part of the journey of Therapolis.

7.2 Perception of Gardening at Therapolis

Sammy professes to have a green thumb; yet, for some time, he was hesitant to go beyond the "miniature garden" of potted stuff and the enclosures for growing potatoes he and his fellows were cultivating on the premises of Resurgence. However, when he felt

he had recovered enough, he was “able to branch out”. This branching out is to him a metaphor for life as a plant:

> You've got some roots now. And now you're starting to grow. So, when opportunities come up, you're able to take them because a lot of the times you might not have been healthy enough to bother going out to the garden because, you know, you just didn't feel like it. You weren't well enough. So, when the opportunity came up, I was able to go.

Implicitly, Sammy sees his eventual decision to participate in gardening as an indication that recovery had begun. That being the case, stepping into Therapolis was for him a nurturing of a process of growth that had started at Resurgence. Interestingly, by advantage of hindsight, he makes a connection between addiction and alienation from nature, calling it a hiding from the world: “When you're deep into any kind of addiction, you're not very close to nature. You're hiding from the world [chuckling]. You're not going for hikes. You're not going to the garden. You're not enjoying the sunshine. You're hiding from it all. And addiction is escape, right?”

In comparing life in nature and life of addiction, Sammy indirectly associated the latter with “the modern fabric of society,” submitting that:

> We have all of this static; … the static can get very, very loud…and a lot of stuff can happen in life so you can wind up a broken toy. And then it takes a while to mend. But nature is a big part of that mending process. So, I think when by the time to get healthy enough to get back outside and doing stuff out in nature, you're getting closer and closer to being healthy. It's part of that mending process.

The logic of healing in Sammy’s thought is a little complex in that while people talk of immersing themselves in nature for therapy, as in the Japanese forest bathing of Shirin Yoku, Sammy sees the decision to engage with nature both as evidence of healing already at work and the continuation of the same process when victims step into nature as

in gardening. The sequence is consistent with the way Resurgence has managed him since coming to the garden is the prerogative of their clients and it took Sammy time to make the decision to participate in the gardening activities at Therapolis. He adduced his hesitation to "not have been healthy enough," and his eventual involvement he attributed to being "healthy enough to get back outside and doing stuff out in nature". Having made the decision to volunteer at Therapolis, how does Sammy see his participation?

The garden and its dynamics offer Sammy a mirror image of his self-perception when he reveals, "a lot of times I think, in recovery, when you go to the garden, you look at the weeds, and you go, I'm a weed. You know. And so, when you learn that, you know, the weeds are necessary in the garden, but you need to groom the garden." At face value, the thought of seeing himself as a weed may convey his feelings of challenged self-worth. When he submits that weeds are necessary, the question arises as to whether he is struggling with his challenged self-worth. Are weeds necessary in the garden?

The popular perception of weeds is that they are unwanted plants that inhibit the growth of the plants in cultivation by competing with them for the soil's nutrients. Yet, classifying some plants as weeds can be context-determined, and some supposed weeds contribute to the preservation and thriving of cultivated plants by serving as a decoy for pests.[2] Nevertheless, in whatever context they are classified as weeds, weeds remain

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[2] Portia Corman, a plant specialist mentioned that "all weeds come from the kingdom of plants and all weeds will produce flowers (or equivalent reproductive organs). They're definitely the underappreciated relatives of some of our most beloved garden plants. For example, what may be considered a weed in British Columbia might be considered a garden gem in Ontario. On a larger scale, a beautiful culinary herb that is desirable in Europe and brought to North America for its desirable characteristics can become a menace — even invasive". See: "The Ultimate Guide to weeds: What to Yank, What to Leave and What you Should Never Ever Touch," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation," https://www.cbc.ca/life/home/the-ultimate-guide-to-weeds-what-to-yank-what-to-leave-and-what-you-should-never-ever-touch-1.5250554.

objects of control because of their potential to damage cultivated plants. Sammy acknowledges this much when he notes that the garden needs grooming. He may not be incorrect in saying that weeds are necessary for the garden, but his self-characterization as a weed is loaded, and he is unwilling to despair of himself; rather, he is determined to see the relevance for himself as an essential entity within the garden.

Sammy's perception of the garden is also informed by his personal experience of feeling positive about his involvement. In his word: "one of the feelings I get when I go to the garden is a feeling that I'm doing something good for myself, good for the environment. And it's going to be good for my tummy because…it's part of a big cycle." While this sense of comprehensive goodness is explicit in its basic value for his personal nutrition, Sammy's understanding of the same for the other domains of his life can be enlarged upon in context. In this vein, gardening is good for him because it offers him supportive values that benefit his total person:

> I go out there, it helps ground me, it helps keep me centered, it keeps me focused because sometimes you're too busy. And when you get too busy, and you can't make it out to the garden, it's like you're missing something. So, for me, it's a big part of community. It's exercise; you're gaining knowledge; you're learning something your ancestors knew inside and out.

Sammy's valuation of grounding, the psychological discipline of focus and presence in the here-and-now, can be understood against the background of his reference to "doing something good for myself". Certainly, the soft underbelly of the entertainment world and its slippery paths are familiar terrains to him. His repeated references to attention-distracting indulgences like being trapped at home in front of a television, being stuck on the computer, and playing video games are also indirect indications that Sammy

is struggling with focusing on what he might consider important, and the garden serves his need to cultivate focus and presence of mind. Even an engagement in schooling to learn business in the aftermath of his unfolding recovery has the potential to get him "too busy" to skip gardening. However, he has the presence of mind to acknowledge that his involvement in the garden is also a learning process in which, along with grounding and centering, he is treading a well-beaten path: "something that your ancestors knew inside and out". It appears this value of gardening for healing is one of his inspirations for visiting and participating in Therapolis.

Still, Sammy perceives gardening at Therapolis as offering a huge value for his productivity. Unlike the world of momentary satisfactions his former industry thrives on, or the domestic pursuit of vanity, "like you're playing a video game and you're trying to … get a high score," gardening gives him a sustained sense of contributing to "something that has a result". And here again, he makes no pretensions about the material benefit of gardening since "you get paid so to speak with food"; rather, that material incentive comes with training and focusing the mind as "you get to watch it grow, especially if you do a whole season":

> You can see the planting, and you can see it grow every week because you go out every week in the case of Resurgence. And especially even for me, I was going out every Friday that I could, but you can see the garden just grow and it's pretty amazing, especially if you do a whole year and you can see that whole cycle of the plants growing, producing the crop, and then you harvest the crop.

The personal value quietly gestating through this experience is the cultivation of focus and persistence, especially for persons coming from addiction who find it difficult to persist at their tasks until they achieve their goals. Sammy understands this when he

acknowledges that it is an ancient tradition, "and it really gives me a feeling of continuity, and… you just get some dirt under your fingernails." The punchline in his

Themes	**Page, Line**	**Key words**
Perception of Involvement		
Identification with gardening process	23.25	I'm a weed
Voluntary service	24.4	you don't do for money
Comprehensively valuable service	24.9	I'm doing something good
Fruitful service	24.15	contribute to something
Harvest as accomplishment	32.28	feeling of accomplishment
Transformation Dynamics		
Interesting experience	22.19	big part of the appeal
Relishing food production	22.29	nothing tastes as good
Physical workout	23.10	it's exercise
Knowledge acquisition	23.11	you're learning something
Rewarding participation	24.19	you get paid… with food
Sympathetic growth	26.7	I get that feeling
Total immersion in nature	26.19	I…hear…see…feel the earth
Self integration	26.24	I get way more connected
Retreat from urban static	26.28	when you go out to...Therapolis
Focused engagement	26.29	You can focus on one thing
Finding Community		
Open and trusting interactions	22.10	it's camaraderie
Community	23.20	feeling of companionship.
Sense of community	24.3	feeling of belonging
Self-disclosing conversation	27.7	you get to learn…about people
Mutual exchanges in … in participation	29.8	Because I can contribute
Learning community again	31.14	starting to belong in society
Openness builds community	33.1	you've let down your guard
Impact of Participation		
Experience		
Recovery as growth	21.27	able to branch out
Centering and grounding	23.5	it help ground me
Appreciation of spiritual values	27.24	it's giving you value back
Reshaping personal ethics	29.19	it helps to redefine my moral compass
Reconnecting with the past	30.9	I rediscovered it at Therapolis.
Healing effect of nature	31.1	nature is a big part
Meaning		
Fulfilling sense of achievement	24.2	feeling of accomplishment
Productive self-application	25.7	now you're starting to do something
Gratification with service	25.20	great feeling you're part of that

Table 2: Themes Generated from Sammy's Interview

awareness of the process at work is that, "You know, you're actually doing something. So, there's a lot of little things going on there". Among the "little things going on there",

for example, is the birthing of a new personal orientation of productivity “because in the past… you weren't doing anything beneficial, but now you're starting to do something that's productive.”

Despite his initial hesitation in coming to the garden, Sammy has participated long enough to have his perspective on the enterprise modified to appreciate its value for himself and his wider community. Nevertheless, it appears his vision of becoming “more of a businessman than a laborer” indicates his valuation of gardening and, possibly, other physically demanding trades as comparatively lower than being a businessman. This perception itself may not indicate any slight on these vocations since he continues to volunteer in the garden after his training in recovery at Resurgence. Rather, it indicates the slant of his mindset as a man of modernity whose life had once been immersed in the synthetic glitter of ballrooms. His “businessman” interest vindicates gardening at Therapolis as not functionally intended to be the sole vocational destination of the recovering volunteers but a passage along the road to healing and recovery. Gardening makes it possible for them to develop stability in character, which is crucial to a meaningful life in society.

7.3 Transformational Dynamics

Sammy’s continuing participation at Therapolis after his time at Resurgence evokes curiosity about the dynamics that keep sustaining his interest in gardening. Why does he keep on participating? He enlarges:

> Some people come out to the garden. And when they're gardening, when we're doing chores out there, they'll open up and they'll talk about some stuff because they're not trapped at home or trapped in front of the TV or stuck on the computer. Now, they're actually in nature, they're in the

> garden. And that's a big, big part of the appeal… to be able to go out there and be outside and in such an open environment.

As one who has recently recovered from addiction, it is understandable that Sammy finds the experience of being in nature appealing, and he can afford the freedom to safely let down his guard in open conversations with other volunteers in the garden. Before embarking on the search for help at Resurgence, his instinct was to stay indoors most of the time as he says, "you're hiding from the world". Certainly, the foundation for this change in social orientation was laid at the theoretical training in mindfulness at Resurgence. Now he is maintaining the discipline of participating in the community gardening experience that aided his re-socialisation into society. It is a commitment at the heart of his strategy to continue to reinforce his experience of recovery.

The weekly experience of immersion in nature and the social exchanges that draw Sammy out into the garden is complemented by the city's urban intensity. Observing that it is difficult to be attentive to nature and be focused in the city because "there's a lot of static," Sammy finds in the garden the pace of labour and interaction that worked for him: "When you go out to something like Therapolis, you can focus on one thing, …I'm picking weeds today, all I got to do is pick weeds. So, okay. Or all you got to do is help with the irrigation. And all of those lead to great memories, especially."

The freedom to choose among the tasks of the day or to not garden is balanced by the icebreakers that start each gardening session, softening the social environment with mutual exchanges in self-revelations that sometimes evoke curiosity: "You get to learn more about people than you. It's like, oh, I didn't know that. Oh, because everybody has a different experience. …And it's neat to see people open up because the garden I think helps bring the best out of people. And I think it's beneficial, but it's an optional thing".

Far from being a burden, this optionality adds fuel to the life of the gardening community. This is because the chosen nature of coming to the garden, to participate or not participate in the gardening schedule of the day, and the freedom to choose other recreational engagements in the garden without the pressure to conform create a trusting environment that is crucial to the challenged mental health situation of the volunteers. Thus, it is not only the momentary refuge the garden provides the participants from urban static that attracts Sammy but also the tempered social environment that promotes trust and mutual affirmation, hence his submission that "something that I always enjoy when I go out there is the fact that I get way more connected". Apparently, the contrasting ethos of the garden to the anonymity and static of the city is quietly transforming reclusive Sammy into a socially outgoing personality who even initiates a conversation with an African research student spreading mulch in the garden.

It is equally significant that Sammy's post-addiction sense of productivity was honed in the garden, and it is not limited to the value it holds for him personally. Having been schooled at Resurgence where lessons in generosity are part of the training of the mind in the tradition of Daoism, he is mindful of the volunteerism built into the operations of Therapolis. The awareness that the products he is cultivating in community with other volunteers to go to the city's food bank gives him a gratifying sense of relevance as he observes:

> You don't notice it, but you're making a big contribution because you're putting in time and effort. And to see those full trucks going away at the end of the season, it's pretty amazing knowing that food gonna fill the stomachs of kids and families. And not only just people in recovery, but the food bank feeds hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people. And it's a great feeling to know you're part of that.

In a capitalist environment like Canada, as with other countries of the western world, economic productivity is a vital gateway to earning a decent living. Individuals may dislike or even oppose the subtle social emphasis on material success. However, earning a decent livelihood is crucial to people's quality of life. This entails not only material well-being but also people's self-esteem and, consequently, their mental health. Challenges occur where addiction, irrespective of what may cause it, interferes with people's ability to function at full capacity, diminishes their productivity, and, eventually, undermines their mental health. Regaining mastery over self then becomes an urgent task, and success at it opens the door to a new life, as Sammy has indicated in his ambition to become a businessman. This change cannot be divorced from his experience at Therapolis where he gained some self-satisfaction from being part of a productive team whose food production reaches disadvantaged people in the city. He confesses this when he mentions that "it's a great feeling to know you're part of that". This sense of usefulness beyond himself is a positive mindset. Yet, there is another subtle way Sammy's mental health is receiving a boost in the garden.

Nurturing the growth and fruitfulness of the field is the primary immediate task around which activities at Therapolis revolve. But beyond the material goal of the communal undertaking, the broader goal of the garden is to serve disadvantaged elements of the city who are struggling with their mental health. Sammy's fascination with the growth of the plants may shed some light on how the physical flourishing of the garden translates to the mental wellness of the recovering participants in the garden. Speaking with a laugh about "walking through the corn, and the sunflowers as they grow taller than you are", Sammy notes that "It's a neat feeling as you go through the summer, and

everything grows, and then one time you go out there, and the plants are taller than you are." It gives him "a really great memory" as he adds, "It's something, again, you've contributed towards. I mean, the plants are going to grow, whether you're there or not. But to know you have a small part to play is a good feeling." And good feelings are essential ingredients to wellness, because they are expressions of satisfaction and delight that resonate with our psychosomatic personalities.

There is another dimension to Sammy's experience as he walks "through the corn". In addition to growth, he mentions continuity in the field, saying that "there are a few things like when I go up and down the corn, it's usually the same row. So, I get that feeling, that continuity feeling". Continuity in the fixity of the plants in their rows and continuity in their incremental growth both express the same evidence of life and flourishing, the former indicating the rootedness necessary for the latter, and the latter vindicating the very essence of the gardening enterprise in maturing its plants to fruitfulness. If this good feeling of continuity through constancy and growth delights Sammy, could it reflect the change he experienced in overcoming his addiction, being now "healthy enough to get back outside and doing stuff out in nature"? For while Sammy's physical height remains constant and would provide the yardstick to gauge the incremental growth of the plants, week after week, he is aware of the changes going on in himself, especially in shifting from a recluse hiding from nature to one delighted with being there as a contributor to the productivity of the community. Could the awareness of the growth and fruitfulness of the plants have awakened his consciousness to the change he himself is going through? Is this a sympathetic appreciation of growth that parallels his own transcending of his past and the limitations it once imposed on him? Finding

delight in gardening, as his mindfulness training has sensitized him to the movements around him, is certainly a forward movement in his continuing recovery from his addiction.

7.4 Finding Community

> Therapolis is … something I look forward to every week that I could get out there. I didn't make it out every week, but I made it out most of the weeks. For a couple of weeks I couldn't work. But I still went there to spur moral support. …Because I can contribute to the moral support of the group. But the group is getting me something back. And part of that is just being out in the setting of nature like Therapolis, and just looking around, and you know, you're still in the city, but you're not. So, it's a really unique environment.

Sammy's continuous participation in Therapolis, despite his initial hesitation and beyond the completion of his time at Resurgence, is the product of another dynamic at work in the garden: community. To Sammy, community is expressed in the "camaraderie", "companionship", and "belonging" in the garden:

> I just find, again, one of the feelings I get outside, it's just a wonderful feeling of, you're part of a greater community, not only Therapolis community, but you're part of a greater community, you're getting out of yourself, and you're starting to belong in society. So, you get a… feeling of belonging, whether because the thing about addiction and stuff like that is you wind up isolating yourself so much that you don't belong anywhere. So, when you nurture yourself, and when you go to the garden, you start to feel maybe like you belong a little bit.

Sammy's decision to step out and participate in the life of the garden is a significant step toward deepening his ongoing experience of recovery, which began for him when he felt he had recovered sufficiently to step into the garden and work. Since sociability can be a vital indicator of degree of mental health recovery, Sammy appreciates the wider implication of the social capital Therapolis is investing in his recovery. This attitude is succinctly expressed when he notes that as a result of this local

participation, “you're part of a greater community, not only Therapolis community, but you're part of a greater community, you're getting out of yourself, and you're starting to belong in society”. Essentially, the gardening community is for him a stepping stone towards full incorporation into society after his addiction-imposed retreat.

Nevertheless, Sammy appears unsure of the degree of this experience of belonging to society when he modifies his reaction to: “you start to feel *maybe* like you belong a *little bit*” [my italics]. The question is how far from Sammy’s pre-recovery mental location does the “getting out of yourself” make possible in terms of positive social participation? To what degree does the feeling of belonging in the garden consciously reposition him, mentally, to now believe he truly belongs to the wider society, not just the gardening community?

There seems to be a parallel here in the geographical relationship between Therapolis and the wider environment of the city. The garden is located on the city’s fringes, still agricultural land with a low population density. As an Enlightenment man, Sammy does not seem able to place the garden’s location and its activities as a place really belonging to the city’s urban environment, even though it is administratively part of the city. He betrays this ambivalence when he refers to the mutual support he and the group visiting from Resurgence receive from one another. In his words, “the group is getting me something back. And part of that is just being out in the setting of nature like Therapolis, and just looking around, and you know, you're still in the city, but you're not.” Obviously, Therapolis as a community is re-engineering his social reflexes; but, for his modernist mindset, the ultimate reincorporation into society is the core of the city’s urban environment for which he has prepared himself to enter as a businessperson.

Meanwhile, the forging of community in the garden occurs through structured and unstructured interactions among the participants, and it begins with the icebreakers that ceremonially open each group session in the garden. In Sammy's words:

> You get to know the people in your group because everybody answers the same question. …What's your favorite colour? Yes. So, it makes it more personal. You get to learn more about people than you. It's like, oh, I didn't know that… because everybody has a different experience. One of my favorite questions they ask is if you could go anywhere, where would you travel? And people will come up with everything from, they want to go to Russia, they want to go to Spain, …and it's like, Oh, that's interesting. And it's neat to see people open up because the garden I think helps bring the best out of people. And I think it's beneficial….

The icebreakers are courteous invitations to self-disclose and to know others. It does not surprise one that a participant like Sammy who has seen the world finds his curiosity ignited when he hears about others' interests in distant lands. The "opening up" is significant for him as it justifies his coming into the open. Yet, this is also a formal aspect of the community-building efforts in the garden.

The real flowering for Sammy involves his observation of and interaction with a consistent core group that visits the garden regularly, which gives him "that feeling that we're getting to know whether people were in a safe place, and we're doing something productive." The sense of being in a safe place by sharing personal thoughts and by being productive, as evidenced in "taking that cob of corn, …taking that ear and peeling it off and taking it home, like within an hour or two of it being harvested, you're eating it", makes his time in the garden meaningful. However, the residual effect of the experience is in his awareness of the communal spirit that makes all these acts possible. In his words, "I think you really build a core of the possibly new friends because you've let down your guard, you've shared something of yourself, they've shared something [of themselves]".

7.5 Impacts of Participation

> I grew up in a really big yard in the city, a big pie-shaped yard. So, we always had small gardens. And we always had … leaves to gather and grass to cut. And so, doing chores and stuff like that was very much a part of my growing up. So, in fact, when I rediscovered it at Therapolis, that really helped me kind of come again, back to full circle, where it sort of helped bring me back to my youth, when I was at my parents' place, and we were … doing our little gardening there.

Through this statement, Sammy's hesitant entry into gardening at Therapolis is expressed as being preceded by his domestic exposure to gardening as a chore. Now looking back at his experience of gardening in community, beginning from "a miniature garden" at Resurgence, he sees his present being informed by his past, hence his assertion of having a green thumb. Although years of immersion in the entertainment industry took him away from working in the soil, the consequences of his wild exploration have finally returned him to this base, and it appears, in the words of T. S. Eliot, he is exerting efforts to, "know the place for the first time."

For Sammy, the overall impact of participating in the community gardening at Therapolis is the strengthening of the experience of recovery that began at Resurgence. When life becomes a broken toy, "it takes a while to mend. But nature is a big part of that mending process. So, I think when by the time to get healthy enough to get back outside and doing stuff out in nature, you're getting closer and closer to being healthy. It's part of that mending process." The mending for Sammy takes place in various dimensions of his personality.

First, Therapolis served as his laboratory for practicing the lessons in mindfulness that he learned at Resurgence. The garden's systematic transformation through the

season, as the plants take roots and mature to fruition, provides the attention-focusing experience the city and its static cannot afford him because of their multiple stimuli: “If you've gone out there every week for 10 weeks, and now you've watched the pumpkins grow and you've seen the sunflowers and the corn is there. It's like a big breath of fresh air. And for me, that's exactly what it is. I go out there, it helps ground me, it helps keep me centered, it keeps me focused…”. Sammy sheds light on this experience of being focused as “concentrating on the moment”:

> I really think Therapolis helps bring you into the moment. Because you have to be there. If you're gardening, or weeding, or doing anything, you have to be present. …If you're not doing that, well, that day, you can go for a walk in nature. And that'll help you focus, and you get anything to get out of the old pattern. For me, a bit of that is pattern-breaking. So, if you're stuck in a pattern at the house, or anywhere, you know, where you're doing the same things over and over Therapolis gives you an opportunity to do something different.

For Sammy, then, being in the garden aids him to break unproductive patterns that shackle his mind, allowing him to invest his energy in “something more intrinsic, that doesn't have a monetary value”, leading to another effect of gardening at Therapolis.

The foundations for voluntary service to the community were laid in the mindfulness training at Resurgence. Therapolis gives these clients the field opportunity to express these values. Along with his pattern-breaking during his involvement, Sammy acknowledges the intangible values that have accrued to him. These are spiritual values that transcend material gains. They include “a really good feeling of accomplishment”, not just in the fruitfulness of the field itself, but in knowing that the products would make a difference to the welfare of disadvantaged families and individuals in the city. It is a feeling that is counter-cultural to the selfish ethos of city life but redemptive of Sammy’s

self-awareness as a living, productive, and relevant member of society, no longer hiding at home as a captive of his addiction. He understands this reality himself when he mentions that “there's a lot of little things going on there. Because in the past, say in terms of the recovery, you weren't doing anything beneficial. But now you're starting to do something that's productive”.

For Sammy, coming from addiction, the feeling of accomplishment one obtains through a voluntary service that makes a difference to the well-being of others is evidence of a transformed value orientation. He seems to be alluding to this when he submits that his involvement in Therapolis “helps to redefine my moral compass”. Although he is a city man through and through, it is significant that he can identify the impact of gardening on his personal ethics. Not only does the garden draw him out of his physical hiding from nature and captivity to his addiction, but it is also refocusing and redefining his “moral compass”. Is this the reason why Sammy is keeping a date with nature in the garden after he has formally completed his time with Resurgence? If this is the case, the synthetic world of the city that he looks forward to in finding a new niche for himself as a businessperson will always elicit his need for this re-centering, refocusing, and redefining of his moral compass.

7.6 Conclusion

Sammy understands his entry into Therapolis as a response to his ongoing recovery from his addiction. Although he struggles with owning his past, as evidenced by the way he speaks in the second person, there is no doubt about his finding his experience at Therapolis valuable for his recovery. Essentially, the garden draws him out of the closet into which addiction caged him and affords him a gradual re-entry into a society

where, in the company of other volunteers, he is contributing to food production. The positive feeling of personal usefulness to society in the company of others in the garden supports his mental health. He sees the growth of the plants and the flourishing of the field as a metaphor for his recovery and character development, what he calls his moral compass. His confessed experience of grounding through acts of gardening at Therapolis keeps sustaining his interests. His urban mindset is in the quest for the ultimate re-entry into society through active participation in the city's business life, and he has prepared himself for this end through tuition.

The agency, Resurgence, introduced both Trevor and Sammy to Therapolis to support, through acts of community gardening, the systematic program of training they were receiving to overcome their addictions. Glen is the next subject of this research, and he visits the garden on the platforms of two other agencies whose supports for their clients are less structured. Lacking the structured mental preparations of Trevor and Sammy, Glen still reflects another valuable contribution of community gardening to mental health recovery.

Chapter 8

Glen: Gardening as a Quest for Life[1]

8.1 Introduction

By the summer of 2021, Glen had been a regular participant in the gardening activities at Therapolis for five years. This enigmatic 56-year-old Canadian, with grade Six as his highest educational attainment, is originally from Western Canada. Toughened by decades of wanderlust, he combines an inner tenderness with physical, rough-cut, cave dweller features. His long, hippie-like hairdo can sometimes be seen blowing in the wind as he gardens with other volunteers. From all indications, Glen's long journey of trauma from domestic violence and eventual rejection at 13 produced in the man a confident and verbally engaging character who sees life in black and white but, understandably, is wary of any semblance of violence.

Speaking of his childhood, he recounts that:

> I went through a lot of traumas in my family growing up, but I tend to stick to my mother because my mother was really kind and loving to everybody. She was an angel. My stepfather was in the whole different dark, really dark areas of life, following Satan's ways, like dark in darkness. So, here I am stuck in the middle.

Glen did not hesitate to recall an instance when he "was bullwhipped by my father where the tassels on the end of the whip would literally cut my skin on my ass. He only did that once, but still, that is enough trauma right there to turn a child on his family."

Yet, while his impression of his mother remains consistent, towards the end of our conversation, he vacillated about his negative impression of his stepfather who, before

[1] The interview that produced this chapter held on September 21, 2021, at Therapolis Gardens. A follow-up conversation was held downtown on July 30, 2022.

kicking him out, taught him many things that are good, “for instance, fear no darkness. Every child needs to fear no darkness. Every child needs to fear no water. A child needs to fear no heights, like high places. Every child needs to understand what trust is, like trust your father”. At face value, this vacillation appears contradictory, and it may not be because he was “stuck in the middle”, between an angel and a “devil”; rather, as it will be shown presently, his personal philosophy is at work in his struggle to make meaning of his ambivalent experience with his stepfather.

Still, in his family, life was one misery of unmitigated violence at the hands of his half-sisters:

> My two sisters, blood sisters, were always against me growing up, torturing me in all different kinds of ways, like tying me to chairs, knocking me over and picking me up, smashing bottles over my head, slamming my head into my bedroom door endlessly; even come at me with a knife. … I had a very, very, very deep-rooted trauma as a child.

Providentially, for him, the dynamics that would later become a mitigating factor for his trauma were also at work in those difficult beginnings. Glen mentioned his early exposure to the nature spirituality of the indigenous peoples of Western Canada as a boy when his mother would take him with one of his malicious half-sisters to visit her father who was an elder in his tribe. Those early boyhood exposures to nature spirituality would later flower into ecological values to sustain him on his future lone journey through life. Glen is conscious of this influence, and although he is a Caucasian through and through, he sometimes identifies in the garden as a First Nations’ citizen of Canada.

Through the years, Glen learned to survive in the street, at first sleeping under the staircases of nearby ghettos. His first encounter with the police came in the bid to make a permanent home with a schoolmate who gave him an opportunity for a temporary

sleepover. His failed bid to turn the opportunity into a permanent residence landed him in group home after group home, including those sheltering "runaway girls and runway boys from dysfunctional families". As he grew into an adult, his wanderlust took him through the city, climbing mountains, descending valleys, following trails, and encountering people in backyards and rooftops. According to him, "I've learned from the elderly, like from the most elderly to the handicap, like the mentally insane".

Glen comes to the garden with no background of a formal intellectual formation about mindfulness or any Eastern tradition for conditioning the self towards a desired end. The highest formal education he attained was grade Six, but his early and sporadic First Nations education as a boy eventually proved to be a deeper influence. Hence, whatever personal philosophizing he indulges in comes from his personal reflections on the harsh experiences of life, his learnings from the First Nations, and the conversations he has had along the way. As the only volunteer who visits the garden twice a week, he has arrived via the platforms of two agencies, New Life and Life Promoters, the former religious and the latter quasi-religious. So, it is not strange that he expresses his thoughts in a black and white fashion.

The question remains how, despite his traumatic background and the possible directions his life could have turned in Vancouver's drug-infested downtown, Glen did not align with the predilections of young people in the city. That he rather slants towards the religious worldview may be attributed to his fond memories of his mother:

> My mother was abandoned at birth by her mother. And she was taken in by the Roman Catholic nuns that raised her till two years of age. And then a family came in and adopted my mother at two years old. And then they named her. Well, they gave her name, because her name was actually never known. …The nuns named my mother Teresa and Mary, both biblical names of mothers that were in the Bible. There is no other

> information…. My mother loved me, supposedly more than my two sisters, blood sisters….

More remarkably, he remembers, “My mother said something to me, deep-rooted, like when I was a child. She said, Glen, you're not listening. You're letting it go in one ear and out the other. So, I actually kept that; I will keep that for the rest of my life.” He seems to have done that successfully by sifting what to keep and what not to keep in his social encounters. In fact, his enchantment with the wild is his strategy for avoiding downtown Vancouver and its allure of drugs.

8.2 Gardening for Healing

Prior to his coming to the garden as a client of an evangelical human service organization, gardening was already a familiar terrain for Glen as he bushwhacked through the forests of British Columbia. The self-styled way-maker confidently asserts, “I've actually done a lot of gardening and a lot of things trail making. I am basically an outdoors guy…. I fascinate myself in the high mountains”. Yet, despite his many years of romancing the wild, Therapolis still beckons to him as a place where he can meet his need for healing and escape from the cacophonies within and around him. He readily provides the reason why he comes to the garden:

> I come to the garden for healing. It's like healing of my mind's thoughts. Basically, I need this. I need the farm and all the great things that the farm can give one's mind as freedom and peace. Because that's how I feel it is. It's a peace of mind, a quietness, a great, calm feeling. And that's the feeling I really strive to know, and which actually betters me.

Glen cannot wish away the hurtful memories from past abuse and rejection, further complicated by the urban static around him. However, he recognizes the need to

make daily efforts to avoid them, at least, if he cannot completely triumph over them. His reason for this path is evident:

> Because of the thoughts within our heads, like there are so many thoughts; we have thoughts endlessly every day. And those thoughts, a lot of them can be really negative, like if you're in a really noisy and negative place. Like, for instance, the streets and all the drug addictions and all the pain and all the suffering that everyone around you is actually showing. Because what you see and hear is that, so I have to get away from that, to get the peace that I need to actually strive on the positive.

This survivor of the wild sees the community garden as his place of refuge and periodic retreats, and this explains why he is uniquely the only participant that visits the garden twice weekly on the platforms of two agencies and would still love to visit more frequently.[2] He elaborates on the pervasiveness of the static around him as a resident of the city's downtown neighbourhood:

> It's so much in the inner city, where I'm living, and there's so much negative, and so much like thoughts that are in other people that are showing right in front of me. And I'm hearing it above me and around me, like I don't have to see it, I can hear it. So, when someone upstairs above me is screaming at the top of their lungs, at their loved ones, like for instance a husband and wife endlessly fighting and throwing each other around the room violently. That is all negative. And so, I'm hearing it. I'm not necessarily seeing it because I have the ceiling that's been a barrier, walls, hallways, and staircases. So basically, I hear it though, and therefore when you hear it, it's almost like the same thoughts; the negative thoughts are actually still moving in.

The garden, therefore, offers him the escape he needs when he is stuck in the city, and the time there is like a window of opportunity: "If I'm out here for six hours of 24 hours, it's like incredible difference, which is very joyful and really helpful." Since he

[2] I have heard him inquiring from the program manager of the garden if he could visit on his own outside the hours allotted to the agencies.

cannot visit outside the hours allotted by Therapolis management, he has devised for himself an alternative in the spirit of his erstwhile wanderlust:

> I have to leave my home. And I go out to the farm or go out into a valley where there are no sounds, but that's hard to do because you're in a city. It's loud noises everywhere. So, what you really have to do is like, a lot of times I put my earplugs in; I put my earmuffs on, and then I go out into the city. And that still is peace. So, if I go down into the valley, I look at the river; I just sit there and look at the river. I lay on the ground flat on the ground, and I look up into the sky, especially at night when you can see the clear sky of the stars. And you're in a really dark place. That's peace right there that we need, especially in silence.

While the wanderings in the city's river valley are readily possible, the garden remains the place of comprehensive wholeness for him. This is not just because of the quietness and the measured tone of life in the community there, but much more because of the physical activities involved in gardening, through which he can reflectively connect to his need for mental health. In his words:

> It takes action to use your hands … to pull weeds; it takes actions, positive of course, because you're doing something positive, which is pulling weeds out of the garden. It's positive because weeds choke out all other plants right in your garden. So basically, that's a positive thing. But acting on it is actually more like healing within your own mind and a strengthening because you're strengthening your positive thoughts, therefore, overruling all the negative thoughts…. And that's the key to actually becoming greater and stronger as a person. Because if you overtake all your negative thoughts, there's no room for you to actually do anything wrong, but all good with positive thoughts.

Glen interprets his physical gardening activities as a spiritual process of self-catharsis. For him, the deliberate effort of pulling out weeds from among the plants is an exertion that translates into the clearing of his mind, ridding it of "negative thoughts" and making room for "positive thoughts" that produce a stronger personality. Obviously, this sympathetic translation of physical exertion into personal spiritual health provides him

with the recipe for moving on, rather than being fixated on troubling memories and seeking quick fixes that can lead to addiction or physical violence. There is yet another dimension to his stated healing value of gardening for Glen.

Themes	**Page, Line**	**Key words**
Gardening for Healing		
The quest for healing	36.23	come to the garden for healing
A place of refuge	37.10	I have to get away
Craving the silence in nature	38.24	that's peace right there
Gardening for comprehensive wholeness	40.11	It's all a healing thing
Escape from urban static	41.6	when I'm stuck in the city
The quest for a soulmate	46.11	I'm really searching
Gardening for Personal Formation		
Experience		
Gardening as positive action	39.15	it takes actions, positive
Gardening as strengthening the mind	39.23	you're strengthening …thoughts
Character enrichment	46.1	to make me a better person
Nature as the ultimate coach	48.25	the greatest thing…I take in
Meaning		
Renewing feeling of joy	41.11	It's like incredible difference
The joy of engaging nature	48.18	the joy that I get from out here
Gardening in Community		
Gardening and relationship	43.14	as long as you don't harm me
Largeness of heart	44.16	let's bring others here
Gardening as participation in peace	44.24	All linked to … that peace
Fellowship of spirits	45.10	It's almost like little spirits

Table 3: Themes Generated from Glen's Interview

The feeling of joy, or happiness, he derives from visiting the garden contributes to his wholeness because, "it's good for my blood flow… the more your blood flows, the more you can heal your body, especially if you eat correctly and don't abuse yourself. So basically, it's all a healing thing. It's all positive, …. that's why I love it the most." This happiness "relaxes" him, "calms" him, and opens him to the "good thoughts" he would love to have at all times, but "unfortunately you just don't get it all the time. So that is why I get out here two times a week." These stated experiences of gardening at

Therapolis indicate the intersection of the physical, the spiritual and the emotional dimensions of his person in his quest for wholeness. However, he added the caveat that making responsible choices in food equally matters.

8.3 Gardening for Personal Formation

Glen's quest for sustainable healing shows his understanding of gardening and its effects on his character. He is particular about its significance as a positive undertaking that strengthens his mind to dwell on the positive in an environment filled with the negative. Yet, the positive for him is not abstract but real and experiential, as expressed through the feelings of "joy" and "happiness". He thereby underscores the act of gardening as a psychosomatic experience in which the human mind and the physical exertion of the body work in tandem for mutual support. Although he is not educated in the Eastern tradition of mindfulness, the sixth grader that time and experiences have matured is validating from those experiences and intuition what the ancient teachers of religion and character have reduced to a creed: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23, KJV).

Glen indicates that beyond the personal need for healing, gardening enriches his social relationships because the exertion of energy involved in gardening comes from giving "the deepest part of my heart and mind". Obviously, the voluntary nature of his participation in production that would serve the good of others gives credence to his assertion that, "I'm giving my strength within myself to this by digging the potatoes and the carrots out, the pulling of the weeds. And basically, that's giving part of my entire being. So, I need to do that…. I find it works. Like to make me a better person within myself and to others".

The notion of "a better person within myself to others" indicates a quest that is beyond the inner harmony of the self through the triumph of positive thoughts over the negative. In fact, for him, it includes being socially valuable to others. In the immediate context of the garden, this aim will imply a reference to his voluntary participation in planting, weeding, and harvesting the products of the garden, much of which goes to the food bank. Implicitly, gardening at Therapolis is not a one-dimensional flow of benefits for him. It is both personal and social. From his self-understanding, involvement there gives him the opportunity to retreat from urban static, cultivate positive thought, and experience happiness. The joy of seeing the entire process through the season is a significant takeaway for him:

> …All positive aspects of nature and growth. …From the very seed that flourishes, like beautiful things. That's the joy that I get from out here. Like even planting that seed and watching and then seeing what's actually being produced from it.

What Glen missed from formal education, he found in nature as his coach. He acknowledges that his growth, "like growing from seed and from the earth itself, and everything in it is actually the greatest thing that I could ever take in, that actually helps me with my positive thoughts and strengthens them." The metaphor of his life as a seed growing from the earth shows how much he has imbibed from his "coach" while

intuitively affirming nature's origin of our knowledge as it is evident in the applied fields of the sciences, engineering, and economics.[3]

8.4 Gardening in Community

It is understandable that past hurts and memories of trauma that could have "turned a child on his family", but which have providentially been managed, would make Glen strive to keep away from violence. Having been broken early in life by the people in what should be the safest environment of his home, the garden appears like another field of social exploration for his healing through community. In this respect, it is interesting that gardening at Therapolis has been instrumental to the realization of his quest for healing, not just because the garden offers him the opportunity to visit but also essentially because he can garden in community and not as a recluse. And really, drawing from his testimony, the trajectory of his life could have swayed in the reclusive direction as a seeker of soulmates that share his temperate values. He speaks with pathos about his forlorn search:

> I've actually very rarely come across somebody like me. It's a really stressful thing, because of the fact that I'm really searching, I'm really searching for someone like me. But the thing is, it's so, so hard. Because like, in all the years I've been alive, in almost 56 years… I mean, of course, when I got to be education wise, …wise enough to see what helps me…. I've come across the very deep within myself, I mean really deep.

[3] The concept of biomimicry readily comes to mind here. The Biomimicry Institute defines the concept as "a practice that learns from and mimics the strategies found in nature to solve human design challenges—and find hope". The concept has long informed the practice of engineering and architecture, but it was popularized by Janine Benyus in the age of ecological challenges facing our planet. At a more conceptual level, Jane Jacobs developed the idea of how natural processes shape economics since human activities are immersed in nature. The arguments of both authors underscore the primal human understanding of reality as an integral whole in which, according to Karen Barad, subjects are inseparably entangled in "intra-relating". See: Biomimicry Institute, https://biomimicry.org/what-is-biomimicry/; Jane Jacobs, *The Nature of Economies* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000); and Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

The redemptive echo in this frustrating “deep calling unto deep” in Glen’s peripatetic wanderings has been in the prospects of his search:

> But the thing is, it's not just this garden that helped me; it's people that I've actually witnessed with my eyes and heard with my ears. …also in the city, and outside the city, and in mountains and valleys, in trails. Or I've come across people in backyards, like up on rooftops, like in businesses, or I actually involve myself right into people's lives, from as far as I could go on one side of the planet to the next.

Thus far, Therapolis has given him an environment where he can continue his exploration of safe and trusted social relationships that enhance his ongoing quest for healing. However, the garden is not yet his “New Jerusalem”, and sensitivity to the experiences of the past keeps him wary of being hurt as he declares unequivocally:

> It doesn't matter which problems you have. It doesn't matter which symptoms you're going through. Or if you're handicapped, or if you're an elderly. I actually love everybody. So, basically, it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you don't harm me; because if you harm me, then I actually have this thought in my head that tells me that I need to just remove myself from you. And that's when I just disappear. And I don't show myself to somebody that's going to harm me. That's how I operate.

This is not to imply that Glen is edgy in his relationships. In fact, a casual observation of his interactions in the garden indicates that he is one of the chattiest volunteers there, generously expressing his views on topics that emerge while gardening and ever ready to pitch in on any task. His response is therefore not surprising when he was asked what he would miss most if he could not come to the garden:

> I would miss that same feeling of joy and peace, and the fellowship of the people that make it here, and the people that are here, the community of the people, because it's almost like little spirits, and because every one of us is most likely guarded by a spirit that's good.

If Glen has found in Therapolis a human community where he can also consistently interact with nature, in contrast to the solitary wild he traversed for decades in the quest for peace and healing, what learning or experience turned him from a pilgrim of the wild to a settler among humans? Contrary to my expectation, he did not mention the material benefits of participating in gardening, such as the opportunity to partake in the harvests of the garden, which many volunteers are enthused about. Rather, he indicated the generosity of the proprietors of the garden as a lesson that invoked his gratitude:

> Well, it's the open heart of the individuals that own this land, the ones that actually took it into their hearts and said, Let's bring others here. And that's a huge step because I would never be here if they never did that. And it's something that's more spiritual than anything for me to find them.

By implication, the generous thought that inspired the garden as a service to the disadvantaged people of the city is providing Glen the acceptance he was denied on the domestic front early in life. And presently, access to the garden offers him the periodic withdrawal he needs from the urban static that reminds him of the violence he suffered on the same domestic front. More significantly, he considers this auspicious contact with the proprietors through his participation in the garden a spiritual connection.

The reason for this is evident. Glen came to the garden by happenstance on a fateful day when, on his peripatetic wanderings, he saw a group of people boarding a van downtown. He quickly stepped off the sidewalk to insert himself among them. His follow-up enquiry about their mission and destination and his acceptance to participate with them brought him to the garden. Although he claimed to be acting on the positive thought in “my mind” when he found the van, made his way into it, and asked questions

about joining the group, it marked the fulfilment of his lifelong search for community in a healing engagement with nature. Hitherto, it has been a solitary journey; now he can go on his adventure in the company of fellow seekers of life in nature. This is the providential experience he has considered a spiritual one. Yet, the spiritual significance of his finding community in the gardening group is not about him alone; it includes "anybody, all the people that have actually gotten into the van, and actually rolled into these doors into this farm to do this work". The reason is that they are "all linked to a spirit that is giving them a part of that peace". "That peace" is his lifelong quest fulfilled in community with his co-volunteers in the garden, and he believes that they too derive "a joyful, positive thought out of it".

8.5 Conclusion

Glen's journey to gardening in community at Therapolis came after a lifelong search for healing from the trauma he experienced in his family. Although the domestic experiences of violence and rejection thrust him out of his home very early on in life, he succeeded in charting a lonely road for himself to avoid the vagaries of life on the street. From all indications, the memory of motherly influences and remote contacts with a Canadian indigenous nation combined with personal intuition and sensitivity to his social environment kept him on track. He makes up for what he lacks in formal education in his various encounters with the people he met in his trails, in his intuitive reflections on his engagement with nature and their value for his personal formation and mental heath. Essentially, therefore, nature spirituality provides him with the moorings that set his social and moral boundaries. The question here is how much healing from the wounds of the past has Glen experienced from nature through his interaction with people in the

gardening community? Perhaps one way to assess him is to reflect on his state of mind about the family he lost very early in life and how he is now faring in the garden.

First, Glen was businesslike during this conversation and displayed no emotional pain of loss or anger over his past experiences. His stoical deportment may indicate that he has healed over time. More specifically, beyond the memory of the physical violence he suffered at the hands of his half-sisters, Glen has nothing negative or positive to say of them. However, he remains ambivalent about the stepfather who once bullwhipped him and eventually kicked him onto the street. It appears he struggles to triumph over the painful experience with positive thoughts as his own way of preserving himself.

In one statement he contrasted his stepfather to his loving mother as belonging to a "whole different dark, really dark areas of life, following Satan's ways, like dark in darkness". His unflattering emphasis cannot be missed. Yet, he can still speak of him with admiration for the lessons he taught him. He even makes excuses for his shortfalls as a father and husband because parenting requires a "tougher ability", and it is a "deep-rooted" thing that the pressures of his weeklong work-life undermined. Could this ambivalence, although indicating a stalemate in his mind, still be a sign of ongoing healing? It is possible if it is borne in mind that he could have swayed in any of the inimical directions victims of trauma on the street are tempted to go, even to the point of despairing of life itself.

In the second place, Glen's strategy of exerting a conscious effort to stave off negative thoughts and avoid the static around him by respectively cultivating the positive and engaging the serenity in nature indicates a conscious commitment to healing. As he mentions over and again, he is conscious of the battle that painful memories stir in his

mind and around him. His mind has thus far been his war zone, and although he has a limited education, reflecting on the experiences of gardening helps him to link physical exertion with the formation of the wholesome character he desires. Ultimately, therefore, the hope for Glen's sustained healing may lie in his continuous participation in the gardening community; after all, it is consistent and reparative that although he was broken in a familial community, he is finding healing in the wider gardening community.

Having explored three cases of gardening participants who came to Therapolis in their quests for healing and restoration from addictions and trauma, the next chapter will explore the experiences of two volunteers who work alongside these broken people as midwives of hope.

Chapter 9

Daisy and Kate: Midwives of Hope[1]

9.1 Introduction

Therapolis was founded to serve the needs of disadvantaged members in its urban environment. However, not all the participants who visit weekly are disadvantaged. Among the latter are agency workers who bring their disadvantaged clients to the garden for experiences with nature. Some agency workers are also assisted by individual volunteers who are not clients. These individuals participate in gardening alongside the clients, but they are not in any way disadvantaged. Rather, they support agency workers in their tasks with their clients through their participation. Two women in this category, Daisy and Kate, volunteered to participate in this study. They offered perspectives from their experiences in gardening at Therapolis alongside the clients from the visiting agencies.

9.2 Daisy

Daisy is a mature woman who has volunteered for 13 years with the religious charity New Life, and she has been visiting the garden with their clients for about eight years. At the downtown service centre of the charity, she has prepared meals and packs, which include food and clothing. She has also served community members at the coffee bar and has led Bible studies at the centre. Qualifying her relationship with the participants, she says, “I am not a community member, but I am a part of the community, the people I call my friends. So, when I come out here with these people that utilize House of Mercy a lot, I've got to know a lot of people. …I've made some friendships….

[1] This chapter results from my interviews with Daisy on September 7, 2021, and Kate on September 14, 2021. Both interviews were held at Therapolis Gardens.

So, I'm volunteering but also a part of the community. I find that a lot of them are wonderful people".

Her voluntary service is a product of her own need for honest and safe relationships because she lives in a townhouse where there is no sense of community: "Everybody nowadays just drives in, opens the garage, drives and closes the garage, and there's no event. There's no Hi, how are you? There's no walking across the street". Her need for community has been accentuated by her childhood experience, having been raised with her parents and grandparents in a community with gardens where "we got to know the community". By that, she means "Kids played with neighbours; the women got to know the neighbours…. So, it was a completely different system than we live in right now". This need for community was her inspiration to volunteer for service at the House of Mercy and to participate in their ministries as they expanded through the years.

Daisy may not be a member of the New Life because she is not disadvantaged, but in acknowledging her need for community in a cultural environment characterized by solipsism and anonymity, it is obvious she shares the same need with the clients she is seeking to help. This section seeks to appreciate the kind of community Daisy and other volunteer assistants seek to create for themselves and the disadvantaged clients at Therapolis.

9.2.1 The Spirit of the Community

The innate human need for community is one of our instinctive yearnings for belonging. Modern society, especially as it is expressed in the urban environment, tends to create a dearth of opportunities for satisfying this desire to belong. It seems the more materially endowed societies become, the more their constituent members drift apart

unless they are intentional about being available for one another in social interactions. Daisy's own experience as a resident of the city underscores this subtle reality of urban societies and she speculates that it is a disease of modern society:

> The number one thing now that statistic shows is that a lot of people are depressed because of loneliness. Loneliness is number one of the top three diseases right now. You'd have to research that, but I've read that loneliness is a big thing now, especially when you get people my age, and people start getting to retirement ages, to 55, 60 and 65. Now, there's more loneliness. And I see actually where I live people that are old are always by themselves, and nobody wants to connect with them. And I find with some mature people, they always think, well, people don't want to connect with me. I find it hard to connect with people.

The irony of the times stares us in the face when we see the disjunction between the pervasive domination of contemporary society by communication technologies coupled with the individual sense of loneliness. The palpable silence and disconnect on mass transit bear witness to this contradiction, commuters shuttling to work in crowded coaches self-absorbed with activities on their mobile phones. This absentminded physical presence and the ensuing anonymity scandalize our deepest humanity and its need for connection in an impersonal urban environment.

While the resourceful members of society can intermittently draw from their pool of distant relationships to assuage their loneliness, the marginal elements who forage to survive, like homeless people downtown, lack the wherewithal to meet this essential need of their humanity. The alternative communities they tend to create are "banal and dangerous", according to Bruce Alexander, which further alienates them from mainstream society.[2]

[2] Bruce K. Alexander, *The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society* (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2001), 4.

Themes	Page, Line	Key words
Spirit of the Community		
Inclination to Community	54.18	they have a sense of community
A convivial community	55.27	they feel safe
Freedom to participate	56.30	no forcing them
Shared happiness	60.4	we laugh at each other
Feelings of gratitude	60.15	thankfulness…[for] opportunity
Considerateness in community	62.3	just do what you can
Respect and considerateness	64.19	don't expect or force them
Patient understanding	65.9	be patient and be understanding
Empathic understanding	65.28	putting yourself in other's positions
Civil engagement	66.6	take into consideration
Generous sensitivity	67.5	put that into… perspective
Learning for Change		
Cultural diversity	58.11	people from different cultures
Renewed values	59.10	got me back to appreciate nature
Living with nature	60.31	get into living more with nature
Indigenous culture learning	70.12	they showed us some rituals
An integrated world	70.25	connection with nature, spirit…
Transformation Dynamic		
Growth in relationship	57.6	it's growing relationship
De-stressing experience	59.14	what I feel is peace
Fulfilling service	63.6	I feel a sense of accomplishment
Comprehensive engagement	63.16	it's exercise, mentally, emotionally
Sense of amazement	64.7	Oh, look at that!
Authentic involvement	65.18	it's your experience
Intentional community	67.28	we're working closely together
Communal growth	68.19	we're learning…growing together
Companionship	69.4	getting involved with everybody
Living generously	72.29	to think beyond ourselves

Table 4: Themes Generated from Daisy's Interview

However, these marginalized people are not only tempted to create alternative communities for themselves. Since their brokenness occurred in community, they also face the temptation to be wary of community. It is therefore understandable that Daisy sees the garden community as a veritable place to restore the trust that may facilitate

http://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC_Office_Pubs/roots_addiction.pdf.

healing and keep others like herself grounded in the need for human connections. According to her:

> This kind of opportunity comes here for me, and I think I probably speak for the other people in a sense, as a place where you gather with people…. They feel safe. And they can feel trusted because it's very important, I think not just for the people from House of Mercy, but all of us to be at a place that we feel safe, a friendly environment.

The agencies and the garden management know this environment does not happen by chance. It must be created intentionally and in partnership, this being the reason for their spring pre-season meeting. For Daisy, forging that safe and friendly environment starts with each trip from the city's downtown to the garden as people "come together in a van and everybody's talking to each other." The process of bonding continues through the formal and informal interactions in the garden: "You get here you have introductions, then you do things in the garden, you do harvesting stuff; so, it kind of brings people together, not forcing them but encouraging them."

A businesslike approach will demand that all who made the trip to the garden be productively engaged in gardening, but the ethos here is different: "There's no forcing, like if somebody wants to sit alone or somebody wants to go off to themselves, they can say, 'You know what? Today I feel like just going about myself'". That decision is respected in community because just being in the soothing environment of the garden itself has value for the mental well-being of the participant even if they are not engaged in gardening. Daisy justifies this laissez-faire approach when she says, "it's not just growing food, it's growing relationships. It's relationships and then watching us grow alongside." Presumably, the respect engendered by non-coercion constitutes part of the safety of the environment.

Nevertheless, as a volunteer in the garden coming from a position of wellness, eagerness for the gardening community, and enthusiasm for all the activities there, Daisy has the tendency to throw herself into the field with compulsion. In her words:

> "I take pride in coming out here, but I'm also a hard worker. I like getting in there and getting dirty, sweating and stuff like that. I don't mind hard work. But I think that's important because it's just not coming out here and thinking "Oh, it's pretty out here" and all that. It's labor".

Yet, she keeps reminding herself of the spirit of the garden: "Do what you can. If some few are strong and able, do it; but if you're not, just do what you can and don't force yourself and don't hurt yourself". In that spirit, she confesses:

> I like that you can do according to your ability. And I'm a workhorse as always. Like, I like getting out there. Give me the wheelbarrow, give me a heavy watermelon, or I'll do digging, or I'll pick lots of stuff. Sometimes you have to drag me off the field… come on and eat lunch. No, I still want to do some more.

The considerate ethos of the garden can be justified since participants come on the trip and into the garden with different wellness needs. Some of them have been broken because society has not offered them places and opportunities commensurate to their abilities, hence they are being left behind. Others are wounded by the harsh realities of life. To compel them for duty will be proffering them the same one-size-fits-all solution to life, which may not resonate with their innate abilities. It can only be a reliving of their pains and deepening of existing suspicion and mistrust of society.

Contrary to the logic that the imposition of a garden regimen might produce better gardening outcomes and unequal self-exertions might provoke resentments, the principle of freedom and its attendant respect and affirmation for the participants produces

convivial relationships in the garden. Everyone comes to the garden with the awareness that the enterprise is founded on the generosity of the proprietors:

> Because everyone is enjoying themselves, I'm enjoying myself with other people, and they see other people enjoying themselves, we have some good laughs …we laugh at each other, whether it was doing something like that, or the way they were harvesting or making fun of something they see like a funny looking carrot or something. So, a silly thing like that is not being unguarded, it's just relaxing, being yourself. So, I find that with myself, otherwise, we just feel kind of happy. And like I already told you oneness, and thankfulness, thankfulness to have the opportunity to come here and be here and have this experience.

The management and agency representatives at Therapolis understand that the various experiences of human brokenness brought into the garden by the participants make necessary their responsibility to conduct themselves in mutual deference for one another. This is important for capable characters like Daisy. Happily, her self-awareness and deportment in the garden show she can balance her personal work ethics with the social ethics of the garden. Indeed, she argues:

> What's very important is to be patient and understanding, because everybody here has difficulty. Sometimes seniors come out. I brought friends out who could only sit and watch. So, you don't get mad and say you're just sitting there not doing anything. No, it's learning…. You come to experience it but it's your experience and what you can do. … Don't compare yourself with others. Don't because other people work hard you have to do what everybody else is doing.

Looking at the governing ethos of Therapolis, the garden stands for social values that are in short supply in the prevailing culture of urban environments where people jostle for survival. The garden, therefore, functions like an incubator for nurturing wounded lives back to health, in recognition of the emotional and mental fragility of most of the participants in the garden. Neither is the garden oblivious to the presence of driven

persons who may expect other participants to pull themselves by their bootstraps. Although such self-assured gardeners are in the minority, their energies will remain a present challenge to the social environment of the garden unless they recognize their position as sensitive facilitators and encouragers like Daisy.

Daisy acknowledges this challenge when she says, “I'm going to be honest, we do have our conflicts when you get people together, like somebody will say something and somebody will get upset… or when you're out there, and maybe you’re working, you’re picking more wheat, you don't get mad because somebody else isn't”. In such moments of conflict, Daisy advocates humane understanding and patience because, “we learn that as we go on”. Does she operate by that creed?

I once witnessed her encounter with one of the clients of her agency, a young person originally from the South. He went for the group’s lunch pack before the group was ready for that aspect of their schedule for the day. Daisy approached him to remind him that lunch is taken together as a group. He did not respond with appreciation but, rather, rebuffed the gentle reminder. In recalling the scenario during our discussion, she explains her logic:

> When we come here or at the House of Mercy or whatever, let's do things …as a whole instead of one person going, “I want to eat lunch”. No, no one person goes. We have to have a kind of program. So, we do everything together; we farm together; we eat together; we introduce each other at the beginning and have that time together. So, we learn to be a community and learn to get to know each other. So, you're not just coming out and doing stuff, but actually building relationships.

The momentary misunderstanding soon fizzled out, as Daisy says:

> I'm the type of person that goes, like to say, let's talk about this, resolve it right away so that we can get back to having fun. I'm that type of person. If you’re upset about me or something happened, let's just talk about it in

> a civil manner. And let's get on with it. …A lot of times I find that when you have a disagreement or maybe some kind of friction and when you talk about it you become closer. It's like any relationship.

Relationships have their moments of stress, and this encounter signifies the dissonance that could result from the diversity of cultural representation in the gardening community. Eating together as a group makes perfect sense to a Caucasian lady who was brought up in a culture where there is time for everything, and meals are often taken together as a family. It also makes sense for an immigrant from the South to hit the "pantry" for a bite of snacks while waiting for the real meal. Learning the ropes regarding living with respect for differences is part of the social learning, healing, and recovery Therapolis is about.

9.2.2. Learning for Change

Daisy recalls that the pre-pandemic years at Therapolis witnessed the visits and participation of people of diverse cultures and demographics. And although the different agencies had time slots for activities in the garden, her group met other groups in the garden. According to her, "They had children, they had school kids, they had people from different cultures and ages, and seniors to young." Her fascination with diversity is that "it opens the doors to everybody. And it's really good, I think, connecting and learning and growing with people and enjoying the garden, the natural environment, and getting out of the city". There are two levels of learning implicit here.

At one level, the diversity makes the garden a mini laboratory for participants in recovery to relearn full community engagement beyond the narrow clicks they know and the mistrust of the society that inflicted pain on them. Although it is fraught with challenges to harmony, Daisy's encounter with her southern gardening colleague

demonstrates that such an environment furnishes the learning opportunities that diversity inevitably yields for participants in the garden. In her case, the strength she demonstrates, both in her sensitivity and her understanding of the garden ethos and the readiness to uphold it, vindicates the wisdom of bringing into the community persons who can rise to the social strain of human interaction in the safe environment of the garden. Such informed and sensitive participants unobtrusively model to disadvantaged participants lessons in social harmony and sharpen their cognitive reflexes to eventually re-enter society with necessary social skills.

On another level, for Daisy, the human diversity in the garden provides a rich opportunity for human connections and fellow feelings across the barriers of age, culture and social class through a full immersion in nature, of which humans are an intrinsic part. In her words:

> It's nice to be in nature to connect to Oneness. You're actually connecting with everything; you're connecting with nature, connecting with yourself, and connecting with other people. And it's a lot because everything is connected. And we have lost that. …You know, we are part of Earth too, we eat Earth, we eat flowers.

It is interesting that a western Christian Bible study leader in fellowship with evangelical tradition conceives of an interaction with nature as a connection with Oneness. The idea is more indigenous and eastern than western, even though what constitutes "Oneness" for her is fluid. Evidently drawn from her onsite learning on indigenous culture and, possibly, Eastern mysticism, she states that while sometimes people call nature "God", "part of God", or "God's creation", she finds the connection with "Oneness" in "getting dirty…knowing that you're putting healthy food into your body. …You're working physically what you can, and you feel good, because it's

exercise, mentally, emotionally, … you're getting rid of stress, and spiritually too, it's a connection with nature". The bottom line for Daisy is that gardening in community is "a whole wellness kind of wheel. It affects everything. It's social, physical, emotional, mental. It's spiritual. It's environmental. It's kind of everything I think you'll probably get…. It all depends on what people perceive…". For her, however, eight years of gardening in Therapolis brought her:

> back to nature and got me back to appreciate nature and just breathe and relax, and enjoy and be at peace, because I think what I feel is peace and contentment when you come out. It's like you're leaving everything else behind. And then you just come, and you get together with a group of people, your friends….

The effect of Daisy's reconnection with nature is a renewal of values. Taking note of the lost value of living close to nature, she submits that:

> We need to get back to it. That's what I'm finding. I'm even starting to go back to freezing. Like I've been alerted that when I was younger, helping my grandparents and my mom, but I haven't done that since when I was young. …So now I'm learning to gather some food, some fresh food, but I'm learning to cook more like stews. And I'm going back to learn how to freeze that. So, it's going from one coming to the garden to how you're living your life or doing things outside the garden. And I'm even looking at finding a place where I can live that has a community garden. I want to move soon…and maybe find a place that lives more sustainably. So that's what I'm looking at now, looking for more of a sense of community and living more sustainably. …I take pride in coming out here but I'm also a hard worker. I like getting in there and getting dirty, sweating and stuff like that.

Dipping one's hands in the soil is not dirty but desirable. Physical exertion is not mere labour but a strengthening of the physical body. Eating from the garden's produce is not just about food for the body but also an affirmation of human kinship with the earth. Beyond these basic connections, the human dimension of social bonding and mutual

affirmation among gardeners renews her humanity: “we're working closely together and on a regular basis. We get to know each other; we get to grow. We get to know each other's what not to trigger”.

9.2.3 Transformational Dynamics

Daisy is not a disadvantaged resident of the city. In fact, in the context of the volunteers in the garden, she may be regarded as privileged. Nevertheless, she indicates how her participation has impacted her, especially in renewing and strengthening her values. The question now is what dynamics are responsible for this experience?

The sustaining interest of the support gardener has been her own desire for community, being a resident of a townhouse neighbourhood with limited social contacts. The garden furnishes her with this community through her participation, but not in a socially monolithic way. Rather, the garden furnishes the community in a generously diverse way. Participation cuts across gender and social class. Although the garden is predominantly open to disadvantaged people, it draws from the skills and commitments of those like Daisy who can facilitate the growth needed by those disadvantaged people. Yet, growth here is not the exclusive experience of the disadvantaged. It is a mutual experience as the privileged and the disadvantaged become, as it were, sparing partners in growing their humanity. Daisy puts it clearly when she acknowledges that:

> We work as groups, I got to be aware and say, well, that person I know doesn't like to talk too much when they're out there with this person…so don't expect or force them. …Because everybody has different abilities and things like that. So, work is good because this is important too. When you come out to the garden, if you're working, you work. As a group, you work as a team. You have to kind of learn to be able to come as a community, but also work as a team and also learn where everybody is. Everybody has different abilities and different desires. So, you can't force things on people.

The ethos of the garden, therefore, sets the environment for cultivating respectful relationships through self-restraint, tempered expectation, patience, understanding, and empathy. As she is constituted by the experiences of her fellow volunteers in the garden, Daisy sees herself as engaged in social learning for communal growth.

The positive side of this social learning is that as the participants relate with mutual respect and affirmation, they collectively build an intentional community. In Daisy's words, "because we're working closely together, we can clear things up". Clearing things up means everyone is responsible for the life of the community through being open and honest about their feelings. Mastering this discipline becomes a growing ambition for everyone. And because no one is working under pressure to meet collective goals, there is authentic participation: "You come to experience it, but it's your experience and what you can do".

Personal experiences in coming to the garden and participating in the day's program add to how change has come for Daisy at Therapolis. Among her best moments are, "just the regular coming in; the ride here is fun; coming here, doing the gardening; …getting involved with everybody; having lunch, and then leaving. The camaraderie and the fun learning in the company of her team are enlivening for her.

The nature of gardening as a comprehensive engagement of the personality through the exertion of physical energy, application of mental focus, intuitive positive expectation, and the primal feel of interacting with the earth leaves an impact on Daisy. "You're working physically what you can, and you feel good because it's exercise; mentally, emotionally, it's good; you're getting rid of stress; and spiritually too, it's a connection with nature.

The feeling of amazement while gardening and the sense of accomplishment at the end of the day also make a difference to her wellness:

> I always ask questions. Oh, look at that! I want to have that. Isn't that a miraculous thing? That grows and grows like that. And when you look at something, you put a seed in and you get this big melon and say, wow! that is so amazing. Oh, I'm so amazing. We have all these foods and all these opportunities to do this!

The whole experience is an integrated one for her, impacting every aspect of her personality: social, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

9.2.4 Daisy in the Garden: A Conclusion

Daisy participates in the Therapolis community garden as a volunteer assistant to the team from House of Mercy. Although, comparatively, she participates from a position of strength, she can fulfill her personal yearning for community through her involvement. Since, for her, growth takes place in the garden amid potential conflicts and misunderstanding, learning about others' capacities and exercising patience, empathy, authenticity, civility and generosity should be the guiding ethos of the gardening community. Cultivating these values in an environment of cultural and social diversity like Therapolis makes the gardening community a laboratory for disadvantaged persons to learn the social skills to re-enter society and rebuild their lives. And despite participating from a position of strength, Daisy shares in the comprehensive wellness associated with gardening in Therapolis.

9.3 Kate

Kate retired as an administrative worker with one of the human agencies in the city's downtown. Both downtown and the faces of the people using the services of the agencies there were familiar to her in her days of active service. This grandmother is also

a pioneer volunteer with Therapolis. Although she has not been connected to any agency since retiring from her job, she continues to volunteer at Therapolis, working alongside the clients of the various agencies that visit the garden.

Kate's interest in gardening derives from her childhood experience of living in the country: "We had a garden, and we all worked in the garden, all of us kids. We had jobs to do, and we did them willingly, most of the time. Sometimes not. But it sort of gets ingrained in you." However, it has been a different experience for her to live in the city as she notes, "Some of the houses we lived in did have garden space. Some didn't. So, you did flowers or whatever. Just still have to keep your hands in the dirt because it's good for the soul."

If her interest in gardening derives from her upbringing, her interest in Therapolis is founded on her relationship with the garden proprietors and the continuing opportunity to meet those familiar faces she knew as a worker downtown:

> I used to tell people, you know what, I feel safer walking the streets in the inner city than I did in the community I lived in because in the community I lived in you never saw people outside. In the inner city. I saw people all the time that I knew from working there. And they all knew me. So, I was never afraid. They're my people. They were my neighbours.

Kate equally appreciates the fact that the garden is "so removed from the city, yet it's not that far" but "has easy access". All these factors of acquaintanceship with the proprietors and the disadvantaged volunteers from downtown and the convenient proximity of the garden to the city combine to qualify Therapolis as the place to satisfy her yearning for continuing interaction with people after retirement. She justifies her decision with her experience of living in the city when she alludes to the disconnected character of urban residential neighbourhoods: "if you live in a detached house in a

neighborhood, you almost never see your neighbors. They go to work. They drive in the garage, they go in the house, you see maybe on Saturdays cutting grass, and that's it. So, there's no connection attached."

Having spent decades in the boisterous environment of a human service agency providing support to a roving clientele, much of Kate's thrills with gardening regard the lively connections the garden affords her with other volunteer gardeners.

9.3.1 Gardening as Life Together

For as long as her job lasted downtown, Kate was in regular contact with many of the disadvantaged street residents there who were using the services of her employers. Some of these clients also visited Therapolis as volunteer gardeners. Retiring from the job that brought her into regular contact with these interesting clients was a significant severance. Happily, the garden fills that gap for her as she says, "if I didn't come here and connect with them here, I wouldn't go into the inner city to connect with people. But just because there's no common ground anymore". The common ground for association had been her employer's services to them on behalf of the city, but that is no more. The city's sidewalks and their few seats are essentially movement corridors for anonymous passersby doing business in the towering, synthetic facilities that define the surrounding landscape.

In contrast to this city environment and the support services given to vulnerable clients, Therapolis offers a more egalitarian community in which nature flourishes, both in its biotic and human dimensions. According to Kate, "we are all here, we're just kind of equal people working in the garden. And you know, I don't live in the inner city, and they don't live in my neighborhood. So, we're just people connecting". The free spirit of

the garden allows for this mix of work and play as Kate vividly describes the environment in which she works alongside other volunteers. In her words,

> It's so nice to be out there. And you know, there's one little group here and somebody there. You hear laughter just drifting on the wind. And it's so nice. It feels so good. …It's like you hear it, you know, and it's so nice. Because you know, people are getting good feelings.

Themes	**Page, Line**	**Key words**
Empowering community		
Homely experience	75.2	It's like coming home
Egalitarianism interaction	75.21	we're … kind of equal people
Social connection	77.16	Connecting with the people
The garden as a focal point	80.14	the garden…connected us
Cross-cultural Learning		
Culture learning/Connection	75.14	I really like learning about…
Educational opportunity	76.24	Would be…nice for the kids
Social Acceptance	79.21	we can't all be the same.
Cultural learning	79.28	just learning…cultural way
Learning opportunity	80.18	People learn a lot coming…

Table 5: Themes generated from Kate's Interview

Kate finds value in the convivial atmosphere of the garden, a tonic that could only be affirmative of her lively involvement. In the same vein, she indicates that the garden is a momentary place where she can leave behind the pressures of city living and, in the company of others, express the lighter side of herself. The motivation for this pleasant spirit is the interests she shares with other volunteers in gardening, especially in contrast to the subtle atmosphere of competition that social significance tends to foster among city people:

> "It doesn't matter if you have a brand-new car…or I don't even have a car. It's a shared interest in working in the garden and talking and exchanging ideas…. And there's no difference in people when you're there doing that task that you're doing. We're all the same. And to me, that's really important".

It is not difficult to understand why the interaction in the garden is important to Kate. As a retiree, her world has shrunk compared to her days on an administrative staff serving indigent people in the city's downtown. The crowd in need of attention in her office and the familiar faces with whom she exchanged glances and pleasantries on sidewalks are gone. Moving from such a vibrant environment of human social engagement, after several decades, into a new experience of reduced contacts is a significant social change. The change itself may be good or bad, but it depends on how Kate is able to manage the residual memories of the past for her mental health. It seems her involvement with the garden is one way through which she is managing this need.

Moreover, in an environment where work, economic productivity, and social status are subtly woven into the fabric of society as signs of human significance, these are not only irrelevant but pale into insignificance in the garden as men and women enjoy the moment as they dig in the dirt. The shared interests of the socially disadvantaged and the relatively better-resourced person like Kate in gardening together creates the egalitarian environment of the garden. While the cheery mood of the community ennobles the tasks being undertaken there, the human connection is Kate's essential takeaway from participating there. Yet, the question must be asked, what is the substance of this human connection in the garden?

9.3.2 Cross-cultural Learning

The garden environment is a cross-cultural setting of human diversity. Cultural diversity in the garden is not just racial or ethnic. It includes the various subcultures of economic statuses, social values, personal idiosyncrasies, and abilities within the broader

categories of race, ethnicity, and personality. The garden is richer for all the skills, strength, knowledge and possibilities the various participants and volunteers bring into it, just as it cannot but be challenging sometimes to harness these different traits to create a harmonious community. This diversity furnishes the substance of the human connection Kate very much values as a participant, especially as it allows her the opportunity to learn from and about other people.

By the later part of the year of the pandemic when this interview took place, September 2021, much of the activities in the garden had slowed down because of the restrictions placed on public gatherings. As one of the longest-serving volunteers who has seen the garden through its various developmental phases, Kate expresses a sense of loss of the vibrancies that were part of the garden community:

> I like meeting the different people that come with the agencies. This last couple of years, it's been pretty much the same people just because of covid. But in previous years, there used to be big groups that would come. And some of the people I would know, some I wouldn't. So, you get to know them and learn about them. And I really like that. I really like learning about people's histories and what motivates them…. I like connecting with people.

By implication, the garden is sustaining Kate's contact with some of the people she had known and worked with over the years, thus keeping alive her known world of service despite retirement. The relaxed environment of the garden further allows her to learn about other people in a dignified way, not just relating to their temporal needs but about learning who they are and what gives their lives motivation. And so, moments such as the initial gathering of groups before gardening when individuals are encouraged to express their views, interests, hopes and expectations about topics of the day are learning

moments that Kate appreciates in the garden: “People learn a lot coming here. I think, if they just take the time to listen, like even when we're sitting around the circle, and we just learn stuff all the time.”

It is therefore understandable that the mind of the grandmother does not leave everything behind on departing from the garden, indicating the vitality behind her thought process:

> The different people too in my interaction with them and when I go home, and I think about it, like the way maybe somebody's behaving or whatever, and what they're saying, and I think about it; it's like, yeah, we can’t all be the same. And it's good that there are differences in people. But this is common.

For Kate, “it’s good that there are differences in people” because those differences provide her with the resources for learning. And the inherent “connection” does not end with the activities in the garden. They continue to provide her with aspects to consider beyond the garden as she reflects on the conversations and experiences there.

Social interaction is not the only way by which Kate is learning in the garden. She equally finds interesting the various gardening methods participants were taught in the early years of Therapolis. She recalls when “we had the bridge gardeners, and just learning the different cultural way of growing things and using the food and how they planted stuff and just gaining that knowledge and exchanging knowledge.” Interestingly, as a veteran in the garden, Kate has kept that vision of experimentation alive. Although Therapolis runs a joint garden for the various visiting groups and volunteers to work on, Kate continues to experiment, by the side, on ways to nurture plants with minimal ecological soil disruption.

9.3.3 Kate in the Garden: A Conclusion

Kate does not fall into the category of the indigent and disadvantaged residents of the city for whom the garden is established. She has been one of those who promoted the vision of the garden and encouraged others to participate in its activities in the early years. She has also participated in the gardening education offered by Therapolis in the past, and she is still experimenting in the garden. In large part, Kate finds the garden to be of essential value to herself in her retirement. Whereas retirement could have shrunken her world to a handful of friends, the garden has sustained the lively pattern of the human relationships to which her job exposed her. The social and cultural learning, what she calls connection, to which she has been paying attention to has been crucial to her mental health.

9.4 Conclusion

Unlike other participants and volunteers who come to Therapolis Gardens as part of the support they receive from human service agencies in the city, the two women helpers, Daisy and Kate, participate there from positions of strength. Daisy's involvement is rooted in her long association with the evangelical Christian agency, House of Mercy. Kate's association with the garden arises from her personal relationship with the garden proprietors and her exposure to the intended beneficiaries of the garden among whom she previously worked in the city. Their experiences of community in the garden, with its associated challenges and thrills, have been their confessed reward for participating in the life of the gardening community. These midwives of hope, therefore, underscore the value of gardening in community for the broken as well as the whole, the former finding healing for their brokenness and the latter sustenance for their mental health. The next,

and final, chapter draws together the recurrent themes that have emerged from the experiences of the volunteer gardeners at Therapolis.

Chapter 10

Summary of Findings

Two sets of people have been the subjects of this study. On the one hand are those who visit Therapolis Gardens in their ongoing quests for healing from their addictions and trauma; on the other are those who volunteer to work with these seekers of wholeness. The former constitutes the original targets of the research while the latter, although not the priority, illuminates the value of community gardening for those who may regard themselves as whole. Both sets of participants indicate that gardening in community benefits human mental well-being. Trevor, Sammy, and Glen constitute the first set, the healing, while Daisy and Kate belong to the second set, the helpers.

In reflecting on his life journey, Trevor is courageous to confront his demon of addiction and he exudes the confidence that he has found himself through the garden, which serves him as a laboratory for practicing mindfulness. In looking into the mirror, Sammy does not seem to like what he sees and struggles to accept the image as his reflection. However, he too finds in community gardening the reinforcement for his learning in mindfulness and is upbeat in charting a new course for life's vocation. Until he found Therapolis, Glen was a peripatetic seeker of the city of peace. His emotionally wounded spirit has through the years braced up to take on life as a roving seeker. Self-taught, confident, and sensitive to his social environment, he has fashioned for himself a form of nature spirituality that keeps him going in life. Alternatively, Daisy and Kate are women who assist the garden and agency coordinators in midwifing the new life desired by these and other wounded souls in the garden.

Several themes emerge in their self-reflections on their experiences in the garden. As expected, these were accompanied by self-interpretations of those experiences. In my effort to make sense of their experiences, these self-interpretations are overlaid with my idiographic analysis of those experiences. There are overlaps in experiences, and there are divergences, both within each narrative and across the five narratives. For example, two of them are not intent on what produce they take away while three see in gardening the opportunity to get fresh and healthy produce. On the other hand, overlapped experiences occurred in their perception of the social climate of the community, in their experiences of sympathetic growth arising from the act of gardening, and in their realization of meaning derived from their exploits in the garden. Hence, the sense of community, the experience of growth, and the realization of meaning form the three overarching themes at the roots of their healing experiences in gardening.

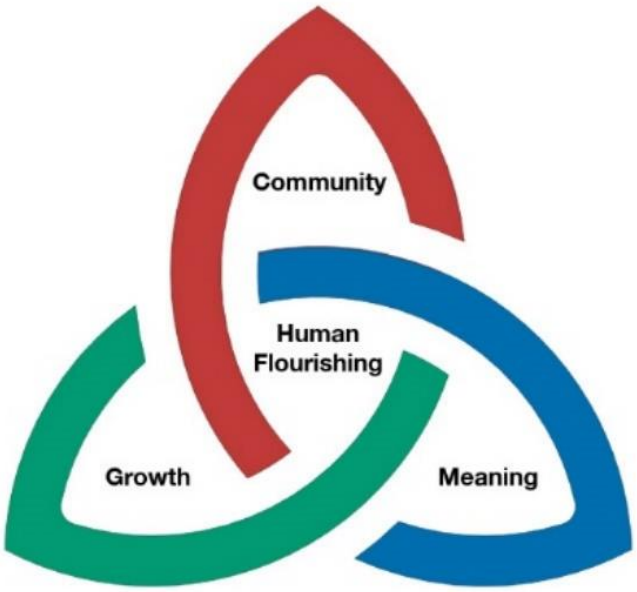

Fig. 3: A Triquetra of Human Flourishing in Therapolis Community Gardens

10.1 The Sense of Community

The setting of the social environment of the garden is not the exclusive responsibility of the personnel managing it as proprietors; neither does it rest exclusively with the agencies. However, there are ground rules that form part of the discussions at the annual spring meeting. The meeting is convened by the garden management, and it allows the agency coordinators the opportunity to discuss the management of their clients in the garden, especially to ensure safety and security. These issues, as well as others, are discussed as part of the democratic governance of the garden. The spring meeting, therefore, creates a level playing field for all the garden users.

While the governance structure aims to create this level playing field through the agreed procedures of operation, it is not enough by itself to shape the social climate of the garden. Since that cannot be legislated, the setting of the social ambience of the garden in ways that complement the various restorative goals of the agencies for their clients belongs to the domain of value-sharing in the garden alongside its ethos of democratic governance. And it does not begin in the garden; rather, it begins at the home base of the various agencies, while the clients and their coordinators naturally bring it into the garden. This interaction implies that the clients who participate in gardening also contribute to the social ambience of the garden and their life together.

From the study, it is evident that this jointly created social climate of Therapolis is an essential part of the transformation dynamics of the gardening participants. By way of assessment, my conversations with them indicate that the resultant garden ethos is antithetical to the prevailing values at the roots of their brokenness. The conviviality, camaraderie, and affirmative relationships formed in the garden provide the essential

background to their transformation. However, individual participants have their unique experiences of community that have aided their quests in the garden.

Trevor: It's more humane. You don't feel like just a number; you're being out here instead of chasing something…. So, it's a quieter thing. But it's a connection. It's a connection that I never understood.	8.19
Sammy: When you go to the garden, you get a really great feeling of companionship; you get a feeling of belonging; it's like when you go there, you're accepted.	23.19
Glen: The fellowship of the people that actually make it here, and the people that are here, the community of the people, because it's almost like little spirits. And because every one of us is most likely guarded by a spirit. That's good… fellowshipping with them.	45.7
Daisy: This kind of opportunity comes here for myself, and I think I probably speak for the other people in a sense, as a place where you gather with people…. They feel safe. And they can feel trusted because it's very important.	55.23
Kate: It's so nice to be out there. And you know, there's one little group here and somebody there. You hear laughter just drifting in the wind. And it's so nice. It feels so good.	77.17

Table 6: The Overarching Theme of Community

For Trevor, the measured pace of activities in the garden, in contrast to the high-speed, competitive work environment in which he was immersed for twenty years, offers him a novel experience of a humane community. For Sammy, the garden was a place to relearn entry into society, having been long self-cloistered at home with his addiction. And for Glen, the garden was a place of refuge from the cacophonies within and around him, offering him the regular opportunity for his getaway. For the three seekers of wholeness, the garden environment fulfilled their various needs to regularly self-recalibrate.

While the trio of Trevor, Sammy, and Glen are in the garden in their quest for wholeness, Daisy and Kate participate as facilitators alongside the agency coordinators. Their long involvements have been sustained by their own community experiences while volunteering. The sense of safe interaction in the secure environment of the garden is a living inspiration for Daisy as much as the intercultural experiences of Kate make the garden a continuing school for the retiree. For both women volunteers, the community life in the garden has kept them mentally and socially fit.

However, beyond their perception of the garden, the gardeners' experiences of community also contribute to the redemptive impacts of gardening on them. The trust that makes them let down their guards and venture to connect in group and interpersonal conversations plays significant roles in their social healing and mental well-being. For them, it marks the beginning of learning to trust their community environment, venturing out in their thinking, and taking the steps to draw from their own humanity to make a difference in a world in which they had experienced brokenness and of which they had hitherto grown suspicious. Their community experiences gave them a sense of usefulness they had not dreamt of for themselves or beyond themselves. The knowledge that they are doing something positive for society and the ensuing sense of accomplishment is life ennobling. It is also dignifying for them that their judgement to decide on how they want to be involved is respected. In functioning as a generous community, the garden is to them like a critical water hole in a barren desert or what Melissa N. Poulsen *et al*. call an "urban oasis".[1]

[1] Melissa N. Poulsen *et al*., "Growing an Urban Oasis: A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Benefits of Community Gardening in Baltimore, Maryland," *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* 36, No. 2 (December 2014): 69–82, DOI: 10.1111/cuag.12035.

Nevertheless, the garden is not without occasional moments of misunderstanding even if they are rare. The rarity of conflict in such a culturally and socially diverse community speaks of the intuitive culture of awareness among the participants and their coordinators that they themselves are building within the community. An occasion involving a volunteer assistant and one of her group members gave insight into the patience and equanimity the coordinators bring into their work, recognizing, as it were, the sacredness of their tasks with the participants.

Another participant who understands the presence of his fellow participants as a positive presence in the garden makes clear his principle of walking away if he feels he might be hurt. These occasional moments of stress are not necessarily detrimental to the health of the community, for they indicate the reality of human communities everywhere which the participants will always have to handle outside the safe environment of the garden. Rather, they offer them learning moments to manage disagreements with people around them. This social ambience of the gardening community, therefore, provides the necessary background for the participants to experience transformation.

10.2 The Experience of Growth

As with the quality of the garden's social climate, the foundations for the transformation the participants experienced in gardening were laid down by their agencies. And those who have been so prepared have profited most from the intersection of the human mind and gardening, or the spiritual and the material, to outgrow their brokenness. From all indications, trained minds in the discipline of mental focus, as in mindfulness, have the prospect to fully draw on this benefit. Where the mind has been formally trained as Trevor and Sammy's has, or by association as Glen has, the gardening

experiences become translatable through their characters. This is the import of Trevor's submission that the garden is a laboratory for practicing mindfulness, the reason why his agency, Resurgence, uses gardening to bolster rehabilitative work with their clients. The success of this can be seen in Trevor's awakened ecological consciousness that affirms the permanence of the world of nature in contrast to ephemeral human pursuits of achievements that left him broken.

Trevor: …Working on the [past trade], you're in the middle of the bush, but you don't appreciate it. And so, what I'm doing now is I go fishing like three or four times a week, and I'm out in the bush, but I appreciate it now. And it's seeing…what was always there.	10.20
Sammy: In the past, say in terms of the recovery, you weren't doing anything beneficial. But now you're starting to do something that's productive. It helps to redefine my moral compass, because I'm out, I'm doing stuff…	25.5 29.19
Glen: I'm giving my strength within myself to this by digging the potatoes and the carrots out, the pulling of the weeds. …And basically, that's giving part of my whole entire being. …. I find it works. Like to make me a better person, within myself and to others.	45.25

Table 7: The Overarching Theme of Growth

It takes ecological conversion[2] for a once privileged character like him who was immersed in the high-speed world of complex engineering practice to come to such a conclusion. Obviously, he found in reflective gardening the rootedness and stability of character he longed for.

[2] The phrase, ecological conversion, was coined by Pope John Paul II in 2001, and the Laudato Si Movement defines it as the "transformation of hearts and minds toward greater love of God, each other, and creation. It is a process of acknowledging our contribution to the social and ecological crisis and acting in ways that nurture communion: healing and renewing our common home." See: https://laudatosimovement.org/news/what-is-an-ecological-conversion-en-news/#:~:text=John%20Paul%20II.,them%E2%80%9D%20(LS%20217).

If Trevor's ecological values and rhetoric of positive change are drawn from Eastern philosophical perception of the world of nature, Sammy and Glen are more literal in linking their gardening experiences to their self-consciousness. For Sammy, nurturing plants to grow and be fruitful by weeding and watching them gain height has provided the mirror for self-evaluation and the inspiration for a more productive lifestyle. Applying the metaphors of branching out, grounding, and observing the flourishing of plants in their locations model stability and growth, and open for him a new vista of usefulness: "now you're starting to do something that's productive". The assurance of personal usefulness eventually produced the confidence to dream of a better life for himself in the corporate world.

For his part, Glen visits the garden on the platforms of agencies that are less systematic in their support for their clients; but he makes up for this shortfall with his reflective ability, founded on his early life interactions with his First Nations extended family in Western Canada. Hence, his nature spirituality in the garden is more graphic in bridging the mundane act of gardening with a character change. For him, the conscious application of heart and mind in, "digging the potatoes and the carrots out and in the pulling of the weeds" amount to giving his whole being to a worthy cause, and that aim makes him a better person. His rationale for this self-understanding is that those actions generate positive thoughts rather than the negative energies surrounding his urban life. Immersion in garden activities is, therefore, a strategy for self-nurturing and preservation from the menacing presence of human suffering he sees in the city. For the three participants in the quest for change, the gardening experience stimulates sympathetic

growth towards purposeful living, akin to nature's default mode of making nurtured plants productive.

The women helpers are no less conscious of the transformations that can result through gardening. For Daisy, her motivation for being in the garden does not lie just in growing food but in growing relationships. Of course, relationship crises tend to accompany addiction and trauma, and the possibility of learning the skills to manage it is the reason why the social ambience of the garden is established to allow those values to flourish that could stimulate this growth. This explains Daisy's reiteration of mutual consideration as the participants relate to one another in the garden. In the same vein, Kate's longstanding participation in the garden is a fruit of her experience with the participants in the garden. However, the cultural and demographic diversities of participants in the garden and the opportunity to experiment with gardening techniques give her a growing edge in the gardening community.

10.3 The Realization of Meaning

The purpose for establishing Therapolis is to assist disadvantaged residents of the city. At one level, this purpose is realized in the harvested produce of the garden, much of which goes to the city's food bank. The participant gardeners too benefit from the harvest of fresh produce. This nutrition support fulfils an important aspect of the material need of the disadvantaged people in view. At another level, the garden also seeks to fulfil the existential need of those who need healing of their brokenness from the vagaries of life. The belief that gardening can aid this process is the reason why human service agencies and public institutions bring their clients to the garden. But how true is this? And how does it work?

Through these interviews, the trio of Trevor, Sammy, and Glen confess to the restorative effects of gardening as they derive from it meaning and a life purpose for themselves. Trevor had worn himself out with endless cycles of work, money, rabid competition, and dissipation when he turned himself in for rehabilitation from his functional alcoholism. His training in mindfulness towards healing found fruitful engagement in the garden as he gains new insights into the value of the ecological environment beyond the commodity mindset of his former industry. The social ambience of the garden too gave him an alternative, humane environment that contrasted with the ruthless demands and competition inherent in his past work environment. The result is that a new purpose emerged for him in knowing that he could serve freely for the good of

Trevor: Now that I know I can help the community. I really like it. It feels like a purpose. …Just being able to give back. With something that I used to hate doing but had to do for money, and now I'm doing it for free for just giving back. I really like that feeling.	11.28
Sammy: You can see the garden just grow and it's pretty amazing, especially if you do a whole year and you can see that whole cycle of the plants growing, producing the crop, and then you're harvesting the crop…. You know, you're actually doing something…. Because in the past, say in terms of the recovery, you weren't doing anything beneficial. But now you're starting to do something that's productive.	24.26
Glen: …When I'm stuck into the city, and all the negatives all around me all the time, this is just … like a little tiny in all the spaces that I have every day, like you got a 24-hour day. If I'm out here for six hours of those 24 hours, it's like incredible difference, which is very joyful and helpful.	41.7
…From the very seed that flourishes, like beautiful things. That's the joy that I get from out here. Like even planting that seed and watching and then seeing what's actually being produced from it.	48.17
Kate: It's so nice to be out there. And you know, there's one little group here and somebody there. You hear laughter just drifting on the wind. And it's so nice. It feels so good. …It's like you hear it, you know, and it's so nice. Because you know, people are getting good feelings.	77.18

Table 8: The Overarching Theme of Meaning

others and find meaning in it: “Now that I know I can help the community, I really like it. It feels like a purpose. …Just being able to give back. With something that I used to hate doing but had to do for money, and now I’m doing it for free for just giving back. I really liked that feeling”. These statements represent the gratifying feelings and increased mental health he experiences due to his involvement in gardening.

For Sammy, his addiction locked him down at home until he ventured to seek a solution with Resurgence, the human service agency that introduced him to the garden. With time in the garden, he became fascinated with the entire process of nurturing plants to fruitfulness and found meaning in his personal contribution to the garden’s service to the citywide community. Coming to the garden where he could learn to connect to community again and overcome the addiction that held him hostage, Sammy’s realization of the spiritual value of service gave him a new sense of joy and purpose in being productive.

Although Glen is not a stranger to the world of nature, he too found meaning and purpose in his experience with gardening at Therapolis. For him, however, the fulfillment comes from the functional aesthetic feelings of joy in being in nature and seeing the productivity of the garden and the relief he experiences from the perceived negatives that characterize life in the city’s downtown.

For these participants, and possibly others in the garden who share their experiences of brokenness, the exertion in gardening, the evident productivity created by this exertion, and the mirthful and affirmative social environment of the garden set into motion the process of change they desired. While all these dynamics interact together to

produce the change, the purposeful life the garden makes possible gives ultimate meaning to community gardening at Therapolis.

If these three characters and the two volunteer assistants are considered mild cases, there is evidence that even those who have had more grievous experiences in their traumatic journeys in life have not been less impacted by the intersection of human ecology with a biotic ecology as community gardening demonstrates. In this vein, Kate drew from her years of garden participation a story from the pre-pandemic years at Therapolis when a group from the penitentiary regularly visited the garden. In her words:

> I used to come, I think it was Mondays. …I can't remember if we started five years ago or four years ago, but what's called Halfway Home. They used to come to the garden once a week. There was a lady I used to work with in my former office in downtown. And then she did move on, and she was working at Halfway Home. She used to come sometimes with the guys; and those men, it was unbelievable to watch those men work in the garden. Because they've been in prison for who knows how long so that when they go to Halfway Home they're two years left in their sentence or something. I'm not sure exactly how it worked. … Linda was contracted to do the cleaning in the facility. And she got to really know the men because some of them would help her. She would teach them whatever she knew about cleaning and polishing floors and all that stuff. And so, she would tell me, after they'd been here, she said, the change in attitude in those men was unbelievable. Because they worked in the garden, they worked physically, they were out in the sun, and they were free. You know, there was no concrete jungle around them. Just that freedom, real freedom. And there was never any problem with them coming. …I met the fellow that used to drive them out. He would sort of see if they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. But that was it. It was not like he would stand beside them and say you must do this. For once they could express themselves in the garden. And getting to talk to them was really special too because over the course of a whole summer they got to trust you and they would tell you stuff about what happened to them and why they ended up there. And they so look forward to coming all the time, and then COVID hit, and they couldn't come. So, then I lost that connection with those guys, too. Because I'm sure a lot of them now have been released. And so, who knows where they are?

10.4 Revisiting the Literature of Community Gardening

Barring the apolitical nature of Therapolis Gardens,[3] there is a strong resonance between extant literature on community gardening and the findings of this research. In particular, the research findings correlate with those of Poulsen *et al*. and Victoria Egli *et al*. which comprehensively capture the value of community gardening for people and their communities.[4] Nevertheless, while their studies and other literature recount the collective value of gardening for the participants and cityscapes, they hardly give attention to the significance of individual experiences since they aim to establish the collective impacts of gardening on communities. This is my point of departure from the literature, and it is what this idiographic study set out to comprehend in the hope that such understanding can yield insights into the wide array of possibilities and dynamics at work at Therapolis gardens.

To this end, this study focused on two intersecting factors in the garden, among others. One is the mindset of the participants. What is going on in their minds as they garden in community? Since this is not just a community garden open to any city

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[3] The garden proprietors are inclined towards the city's disadvantaged elements, hence establishing the garden to serve them. However, the garden as a corporate entity operates apolitically.

[4] Melissa N. Poulsen *et al*., "Growing an Urban Oasis: A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Benefits of Community Gardening in Baltimore, Maryland," *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* 36, No. 2 (December 2014): 69–82, DOI: 10.1111/cuag.12035; Victoria Egli, Melody Oliver and El-Shadan Tautolo, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing," *Preventive Medicine Reports* 3, (June 2016): 348-52. https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S2211335516300249?token=C84E6463659F02D6BFE259007A661F52ADC86BEBB3967402470CD391E64065A597F7D604C95E2AAC4F121CB551C6B388&originRegion=us-east-1&originCreation=20220817023038. See also Way Inn Koay and Denise Dillon, "Community Gardening: Stress, Well-Being, and Resilience Potentials," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 18 (September 2020): 6740. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17186740; Laura McGuire, Stephanie L. Morris, and Tessa M. Pollard, "Community Gardening and Wellbeing: The Understandings of Organisers and Their Implications for Gardening for Health," *Health and Place* 75 (May 2022): 102773. DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102773.

resident, it matters what those disadvantaged volunteers think about their involvements and experiences and how those thoughts contribute to the valuation of their lived experience in the garden.

The second factor is the total ecological environment of the garden. This includes the physical environment of the garden and the quality of its social ambience. That means this study is not exploring the gardening activities at Therapolis as a detached, objective process but as an interactive process of humans among themselves and with the physical environment. Although this research is idiographic, it sees the interactions between the gardeners and the total ecology of the garden as a microcosm of our human interaction with the global ecological matrix. The idiographic nature indicates that the needs that brought individuals into the garden and the prior formation they had with their agencies varied, and they informed their approaches to life in the garden community and their interpretation of their experiences. Happily, this is a positive outcome.

As an investigation into the human mind in a specific context, the use of IPA research methodology has proven appropriate since it is a tool for investigating intrinsic human experiences that often go unnoticed in everyday life. Its idiographic dimension has particularly proven valuable for uncovering unique individual experiences as they are appropriate to the individual quests of the participants in community gardening.

The need for detailed investigations, even if microscopic, is justified by the submission of McGuire, Morris, and Pollard:

> There is a sense that community gardens 'have it all'; their 'holistic' orientation is one of their appeals. In these gardens, people may gain skills…, develop attachment to place and community, and flourish…. However, their therapeutic potential may not be available to all, depending partly on differing biographical experiences of nature and gardening…, and not all of the discourses that circulate within community gardens are

> philanthropic or benign. Gardens and greenspaces may be spoken about in ways that can perpetuate harmful discourses, often related to xenophobia or exclusionary perceptions about heritage…. Both negative and positive aspects of the socio-ecological… space of the garden affect participation in gardening practices….[5]

Since idiographical studies consider the uniqueness of individual experiences in the gardening community, they hold the potential to avoid this generalization.

While many other studies acknowledge the significance of community for the well-being of the gardeners, among others, this study underscores two additional variables that are significant to the experience of the gardeners: personal growth and the discovery of meaning. The former finds expression in applicable learning derived from community interactions and from gardening and the latter in finding one's life purpose. What follows in the interaction of the three variables is the recovery and thriving of these participants as they take on life again. These are three critical dynamics at work in the sustenance and transformation of community gardeners at Therapolis even if the details of these experiences vary from individual to individual.

Nevertheless, more studies still need to be carried out on the dynamics that translate community gardening into positive experiences for gardeners. Since community does not automatically take place in the gardens, it is necessary to understand how governance and other factors shape the ethos of gardening communities and facilitates the outcomes of gardening, positive or negative. This is necessary if gardening will continue to deliver on the expectations of gardeners and not prove counterproductive as McGuire, Morris, and Pollard cautioned.

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[5] Laura McGuire, Stephanie L. Morris, and Tessa M. Pollard, "Community Gardening and Wellbeing: The Understandings of Organisers and Their Implications for Gardening for Health," *Health and Place*, 75 (May 2022): 102773. DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102773.

10.5 Conclusion

The idiographic studies on the gardeners at Therapolis indicate some lessons in how gardening might have contributed to the reported changes they experienced. In the first place, the "community" in urban community gardening does not automatically happen as a default outcome of people gathering together. The different vulnerabilities the gardeners bring into the garden require that the garden be intentionally made a safe place for them. In this vein, the indirect involvement of the gardeners in the process through the democratic governance of the garden by their coordinators and the management of Therapolis prepares them for the ethos of the garden.

Secondly, the diversity of backgrounds, needs, abilities, and openness the gardeners bring into the garden can be a recipe that undermines or strengthens the garden community. This explains the reason why the mutually agreed on mode of operation is often referred to at the opening of each group's gardening session for reinforcement. It is a liberal ethos, but it is also designed to ensure mutual respect, and hence an environment of trust.

Thirdly, the experience of each gardener in the community was informed by their social, mental and spiritual locations. How and what they drew from the opportunities the garden afforded depended on their personalities and needs, the former being moderated in the garden by the ground rules they mutually agreed to, which constitute the unwritten contract guiding their interactions.

Fourthly, gardeners whose mental awareness have been sharpened by their agencies, as with lessons in mindfulness, tended to have keen observation and strong reflective capacities while gardening. They could draw lessons from the most seemingly

trivial activity irrespective of whether it is social or agricultural, and internalize them for their growth.

Finally, the interaction in the gardening community is an intersection of human ecology and biotic ecology, the latter providing the matrix in which disadvantaged and vulnerable persons advance the course of their lives by learning community, experiencing growth and finding purpose through productivity and interaction. The trusting environment and the various sharing of life's experiences foster a humane environment.

All of these dynamics created a garden community in which the gardeners learned to let down their guards, readily shared their perspectives on the events taking place in the garden, and found value in gardening together. This gregarious environment in the embrace of nature is the ultimate recipe that sustained their interest in voluntarily showing up week after week and contributed to their mental health. Does this experience in nature hold any lesson in reinforcing theoretical and exegetical learning in Christian eco-theology? This, as well as some theological reflections, is the subject of the final chapter.

Part III: Learning from Urban Community Gardening for an Ecological Ministry

Chapter 11

Toward the Practice of Ecological Ministry

The foregoing idiographic studies of a group of gardeners at Therapolis has been undertaken to draw lessons from the value of human thoughtful embeddedness in nature, or God's creation. The reason is the need to take beyond mental assent the emerging perspectives of Christian eco-theology.

The current efforts at delineating Christian eco-theology have been founded on critical reflections on Judeo-Christian scriptures in the context of human activities on the planet, Christian traditions, and scientific research. The consequent emergence of different theological trajectories has been shaped by biblical exegeses of critical texts, the reformulation of old doctrines, and the borrowing of insights from the sciences and non-Christian sources encountered in the global expansion of Christianity.

Leonardo Boff's paradigm of ecology and liberation and the non-conformist views of the eco-feminist movement draw strongly from non-Christian sources and pivot their contributions towards the quest for ecological justice for all beings on the planet. Virtually all the resultant eco-theologies are based on human reflections on Christian scriptures, Christian traditions, and scientific knowledge. However, this research is drawing theological reflections from the human encounter with the ecological environment through urban community gardening for pertinent reasons.

The current ecological situation shows that intellectual assent to doctrinal formulations without a sustained, living encounter with nature cannot court the affection of the faithful for God's creation. To this end, and without any intention to generalize the findings of the study, the outcome of the idiographical research conducted at Therapolis

may inform Christian communities on how to practically connect the Christian faithful to God's creation and give them a living experience of meaningful engagement with nature.

11.1 Insights from Community Gardening for an Ecological Ministry

Basically, the task of a Christian ecological ministry is to raise the awareness of Christian people about the nature of their ecological environment, their intrinsic connection to its health, and how they can be more intentional in this connection, depending on how they presently self-evaluate the connection. Ecological ministry does not introduce them to the ecological environment, because their daily activities are already immersed in it socio-culturally, biotically, and spiritually. The task is to raise awareness of what is already in place and thereby evoke in Christian people an intentional commitment to God's creation.

Joseph Sittler rightly qualified this commitment to God's creation as an evocation of grace. Referring to his use of the word in his "Essays on Nature and Grace", he wrote that "When …the ecological facts of life are alluded to, such allusions are not introduced as arguments for the reality of grace; they are rather descriptions of the *field* of grace [Sittler's italicization], expositions of the actuality of man's life and placement within the web of nature" [sic].[1] Max Stackhouse would later follow in his steps.[2]

An intellectual knowledge about God's creation as in the present formulations of eco-theology can evoke awareness at that level, and it is foundational to our developing the right attitude towards creation. Yet, while it is not all Christian people that can fully grasp the complexity of this theoretical learning, most people can feel the earth and,

[1] Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken (eds), *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 88.

[2] Max L. Stackhouse, *God and Globalization,* vol. 4, *Globalization and Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 134.

possibly, smell roses, laugh and feel safe among friends, and watch nature systematically transform a few grains into bountiful harvests. These experiences can be meaningful to church folks if and when they stop, look around themselves, and stoop to engage with nature. The idiographical studies of gardeners at Therapolis show examples of this intentional immersion in nature and the diverse possibilities community gardening may hold for making theoretical and exegetical learning about God's creation a present and fulfilling experience according to individual needs. Here are a few of those possibilities.

Urban community gardening offers Christian people another form of opportunity for outreach. Outreach has been in the character of the Christian tradition, and it has assumed different manifestations throughout the centuries—medical, educational, agrarian, and socio-cultural. Although Therapolis does not self-describe as a Christian community garden, its roots, as indicated earlier, are deep in this tradition. In the age of ecological stress, when ecological mission is gradually evolving, community gardening opens another creative avenue for Christian communities to reach out to their wider communities in the quest for their neighbors' comprehensive wholeness and to affirm their dignity.

Current initiatives among local churches need to go beyond food security to address the total need of the total person in the total environment, and possibly include partnerships with persons and institutions with specialized skills in providing care as Therapolis has set the pace. Those who practice community gardening practice grace and community. Glen says this much when he acknowledges the generous spirit that set up Therapolis and invited disadvantaged people to come over.

Community gardening affords Christian people the opportunity to share their strengths and care for one another and for those who are vulnerable. One of the strengths of Christian communities is the diversity of giftedness and skills believers bring into them. These have been at the roots of the Christian culture of volunteerism over the centuries and community gardening offers them the opportunity to express their love for God's creation. This includes both the natural world and the vulnerable persons who visit as victims of society's hard-nosed economic and political decisions they have no power to navigate. Supporting the well-being of such persons who are also created "in the image of God," is an intrinsic part of the moral ecology of God's creation.

Moreover, the garden environment allows everyone to engage the land and community according to their capacities. The intentional creation of a level playing field in Therapolis indicates how a non-threatening environment can stimulate trust and growth in the gardening community. In the spirit of justice and equity, which were at the centre of the social ethics of Judeo-Christian spirituality, Christian community gardens can foster affirmative environments in which people can contribute to the life of their gardening communities as significant persons.

As with other disciplines being promoted by Christian communities to reduce human ecological footprints, community gardening encourages eco-theological reflections and formulations to serve as living expressions in time and space. However, the uniqueness of community gardening is that the gardeners interact directly with nature rather than with its human products. Be that as it may, the value of the theological enterprise is in its capacity to awaken consciousness at the intellectual level. This awakening is necessary if gardening is not to be simply another noble activity that simply

satisfies the human need for food. Rather, it has the potential to illuminate the scriptures for Christian people and creatively draw from other sources to sharpen their vision of and sensitivity to God's creation.

Finally, for those whose intellectual capacities have been sharpened by theoretical and scriptural learning in eco-theology and who can distill their spiritualities to engage the terrestrial and the mundane, eco-theological practice through gardening can be a living encounter with the divine. Reflection on encounters with the human spirit in all its vulnerabilities and potentials, and nature in all its beauty and generosity, can evoke a sense of transcendence in the garden, hence a deepened affection for God's creation. This experience of transcendence is ultimately where human affection toward God's creation may even be birthed. While it is not every Christian that has the capacity for complex theological formulations and arguments, everyone has the capacity to reflect on their experiences in gardening by training their senses, through the habit of use, to experience transcendence in the ordinariness of gardening activities and to develop respect and a commitment for God's creation.

The bottom line of this learning is that reflective gardening in an environment of multifaceted ecological activities creates, in the long run, association and familiarity between the human mind and nature. This habit of using the mind in gardening is a prerequisite for love and appreciation for the land, people, and other living beings in the environment. The consequent reward of rootedness comes to the discerning, the depth of which the inattentive mind cannot plumb.

Reflective gardening is the practice that opens the mind to perceive what is already in place in God's creation but waiting to be discovered. It is not making an idol of

God's creation. Instead, it is learning to cultivate true stewardship. The idiographic studies at Therapolis demonstrate that reflective gardening is the precinct where intellectual awareness and spiritual discernment meet, hence science and spirituality, as eco-theologians are now encouraging us to realize.

11.2 Some Theological Reflections

The idiographical studies of urban community gardeners at Therapolis unanimously indicate that it holds immediate significance for the disadvantaged and underserved persons in our urban world, but does it hold similar importance for those who are not disadvantaged? The experiences of the "midwives of hope" at Therapolis indicate, at least, the value of community that urban community gardening holds for everyone. The repeated emphasis on the value of community in urban gardening research implicitly entwines human ecology with the biotic ecology of community gardens. Could this default linkage possibly indicate our innate tendency to gravitate back to our primal beginnings as the species of homo sapiens originally meant to flourish in the nurturing ecological matrix of God's creation and in our mutual care for one another? This concluding theological reflection sees community gardens as microcosms of our global ecological environment, with the human experiences there modelling the potential for our respectful engagements with one another and with God's creation.

It should be stated that those who have benefitted most from the comprehensive wholeness that community gardens afford are those who were able to garden reflectively. It is doubtful if those whose motivation for participation is only the quest for food can attain a spiritual value with their involvement. This reflective ability that has endowed humans as thinking beings, irrespective of whether knowledge is tutored or spontaneous,

makes it possible for the spiritually discerning gardener to perceive, learn, grow, and find meaning in their endeavors beyond obtaining the produce from gardening.

A garden's produce is essential for bodily nourishment, but "'man' shall not live by bread alone"; instead, we humans must discern higher purposes that dignify us as we are meant to be. By the advantage of hindsight, it seems this process of reflective gardening intuitively informed primal societies to see value and significance in their engagements with the world of nature, and it provided them the spiritual framework and moral compass with which they navigated life as individuals and as societies. Over the centuries, the process led them to sacralise their world and inspired them to tread the ground softly, even if they did it to a fault when viewed from our contemporary perspective.

All this is to say that although the central place that nature and its elements play in the practices of the primal religions of the world made them objects of criticism in Abrahamic religions, their presuppositions are not arbitrary but informed by what Christian theologians acknowledge as the general revelation of divine presence in the universe. Their reflective engagement with nature sharpened their senses to see and feel, beyond the material and the obvious, the presence of the divine in the universe. Psalm 19 of the Hebrew Scripture masterfully underscores this presence.

Unsurprisingly, a contemporary Christian theologian like Boff, as well as others,[3] has drawn from the insights and wisdom of primal societies to argue the integral nature of human ecology to the total ecology of the environment. Yet, the dominant perception of

[3] A few pioneers of Christian ecological vision from the 1970s drew inspiration from the ecologically sensitive Eastern religions. Among them were Fr. Thomas Berry and his protégés who are anchoring the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Evelyn Mary Tucker and John Grim.

the natural world among Christians is still largely informed by the ideology of consumerism in which nothing in nature is sacrosanct.[4] This accession of contemporary Christian communities to the global consumerist ideology is but a twentieth-century opportune outcome of the endemic polemical stance of Judeo-Christian tradition against indigenous spirituality, which can also be traced to the tirades of ancient Hebrew prophets against the nature spiritualities and fertility cults of ancient Near East.

Although Christian communities are gradually coming to terms with the reality of the global ecological crisis, especially with the emphasis on stewardship, our self-understanding in relation to the natural world, or creation, is still far behind the reality of our embeddedness in it and, in fact, our intrinsic belonging to it as one of its species and co-travellers in time with other forms of creation. In this respect, the stewardship motif as a response to the ecological crisis of our time is a desirable beginning in retrieving our primal mandate to creatively but carefully call forth the potentials of God's creation, as our ancient predecessors were wont to do. However, unless that sense of stewardship evolves from spiritual discernment, it will fall short of the radical change in attitude the current situation calls for, which is heartfelt devotion to care for God's creation as true and faithful stewards. The present, glib rhetoric of stewardship cannot go far because it connotes a vague sense of dutiful compulsion rather than love, appreciation, and dedication. Yet, vague as it tends to be, human nature resents compulsion.

The beauty of devoted care for God's creation ennobles our service and engagement by making us co-creator with the great Creator. It gives us joy and meaning,

[4] White, Jr, T. Lynn. The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. *Science* 155, no. 3757 (March 1967): 1203-07. http://home.sandiego.edu/~kaufmann/hnrs379/White_1967.pdf.

returning to us beauty as a gift. The drudgery from acts of compulsion cannot yield us such an invaluable experience.

John O'Donohue alludes to this beauty as a gift when he writes in the closing chapter of his work, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*:

> Many of the most luminous gifts of our lives arrive as complete surprises. A gift is the most beautiful of intrusions. It arrives undeserved and unexpected. It comes ashore in our hearts carefully formed to fit exactly the shape of the hunger we might not even know we had. The gift comes with no price tag, no demand that puts us under an obligation.

The masterstroke in his thoughtful reflection is that, "Every gift has an inner lamp that casts a new brightness over an undiscovered field of the heart." The lived experience of the group of gardeners studied at Therapolis vindicates this reflection. One was awakened to a new sense of ecological awareness that had always been there; another is able to develop new reflexes to chart a new life path for their future; still, another found safety and protection in the embrace of nature and an open community.

In giving that closing chapter the title, "God is Beauty", O'Donohue might have indicated the reason why the beauty of creation has often been the theatre of a human encounter with the divine. From our rustic forefathers and mothers, through the sages and prophets of our long human history, to our modern hermits, God's creation is often an inviting experience to those who are attentive to the depths within them. This opportunity is what urban community gardens offer city people, both the broken and the whole. To be lovingly constituted by this experience is to internalize the values of growth, healing and serenity inherent in God's creation.

Another drawback of the glib stewardship motif as a response to our ecological crisis is that it is hardly touched by the unspeakable experience of embeddedness in

nature, the foretaste of which community gardening offers. This invaluable prospect in human engagement with God's creation as demonstrated by community gardening in Therapolis should be a more promising motivation for redemptive actions toward the ecological environment. Engagement is a value added to our basic material sustenance when we undertake the act intentionally and reflectively.

The spiritual reward of transformation that flows from this reflective engagement holds the potential to restore value to our total ecological environment—moral, social, and biotic—and this can only mark the beginning of our journey back home to the planet as our safe habitat. Yet, the required redemptive action must necessarily begin with the right attitude towards the physical universe we humans cohabit in with other sentient beings. Two contrasting aspects of Christian theology come into focus here, and these are protology, the study of origins, and eschatology, the study of the end.

11.3 Concluding Thoughts: On Christian Protology and Eschatology

In protology, the human experiences that have been documented in community gardening as people immerse themselves in the ecological environment say something about the healing effect of the land as it is implicit in the Christian story of origin and fall. That being the case, the redemptive value of community gardening underscores the Christian story of creation that presents the garden as the ultimate metaphor for the human habitat. Yet, if we go by the documented experiences of human restoration in community gardening, it could be that what is termed a curse after the fall carries with it the process of human redemption from moral and social vulnerabilities that have since dogged our existence. For when Sammy says gardening redefines his moral compass and Glen confidently asserts that by weeding and pulling the carrots out of the ground with

his physical energy he is strengthening his positive thoughts, both gardeners are affirming the redemptive value in thoughtfully exerting themselves while engaging with God's creation. The same applies to those who visited from Halfway Home. Toiling with "the sweat of your brow" can yield more than the produce of the field to sate human hunger; the experience enlarges when physical exertion is accompanied by a presence of mind as in reflection. Trevor got it right when he reckoned the garden as his laboratory for meditation. The bottom line is that reflective gardening in community makes possible for the gardener a spiritual enrichment that produces a nurturing community, holistic growth, and a sense of meaning.[5]

On the other hand, from the Christian eschatological viewpoint, the subject of human relations with creation has occupied Christian thinkers for ages, often conceived in a tension between our indifference to nature and our appreciation for its value towards our fullest flourishing. Those who are indifferent tend to see its fallenness while those who feel positively towards nature ennoble it with the qualification of God's creation. Again, this may be traced to the two processes mentioned above, that is the tradition of the Hebrew prophets and the encounters of Christianity with indigenous societies in its worldwide expansion.

Nevertheless, the potential to recognize the transcendent value of God's creation is also present in the Judeo-Christian theology of redemption. We see this in the

[5] Reflective gardening is consistent with the admonition of the reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin as referred to on page 6 above. Reflection yields for the attentive gardener the appreciation for the mystery of life as demonstrated in the simple growth and fruition of plants. Those who are involved in animal husbandry too can appreciate the sentience that pervades our planet. These realities inevitably call us to tread the earth responsibly, capable of evoking the humility in the confession, "…When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars… what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them" (Psalm 8: 3,4 [NIV])?

prophetic vision of redemption in the national history of the Hebrew nation, which, over and again, tends to include the personification of creation as celebrating the political, moral, and spiritual restoration of God's people. Isaiah's vision of the messianic age expressed it profoundly when he prophesied that: "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow (Isaiah 55: 12, 13a, NIV). For the prophet, creation will not only celebrate restored humanity, but it will triumph over its encumbrances.

That prophetic tradition also anticipated a messianic age that will be marked by complete restoration of harmony to our troubled cosmos, exemplified in expected irenic relationships between humans and other elements of nature: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them" (Isaiah 11: 6, NIV). The significant symbolism conveyed in the promised redemption of the cosmos is comprehensive enough to evoke human affection for it in time.

Coming to the Christian scriptures, the apostolic writings are no less mindful of the world of nature when they acknowledge it as anticipating redemption with the human heirs of salvation. Vividly ascribing sentience to the world of nature as part of creation, Paul wrote to his Roman audience that, "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." His reason was: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Rom 8:19-22, NIV).

Referring to Max Stackhouse's distinction between nature and creation while reading this text, it should be noted that the two words were used in Paul's Letter to the Romans in different contexts, signifying conscious usages. He used in the text of Romans 8 the word κτισιζ, *Ktisis*, a feminine noun that qualifies the cosmos as a creation *ex-nihilo*, that is out of nothing.[6] This cosmos that was fashioned out of nothing is the universe of which part is our planet and includes the unmodulated elements Stackhouse calls nature.

Elsewhere, in the same letter—1:26, 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24—Paul also used the word φυσιζ, *Phusis*, another feminine noun meaning "nature" or an underlying constitution of someone or something.[7] If the cosmos is destined for redemption as Paul posited, it follows that the world of nature will share in that redemption. This is evident in the final eschatological vision recorded in the Christian scriptures, the Apocalypse, which graphically illustrates the anticipated restoration of the cosmos as the New Jerusalem that is to be marked by material beauty and nature's life-giving properties (Rev. 22:1, 2).

There is no doubt that the messages of the Apocalypse are encoded in complex metaphors and illustrations, but the big picture of total cosmic redemption is clear, ennobling the world of nature as a divine creation and not a material evil as it was once conceived by some ancient esoteric religions and philosophies.[8] This recurring theme in the Judeo-Christian eschatological vision of the redemptive prospects that await the life and vitality of God's creation is sometimes missed in the emerging Christian eco-

[6] Blue Letter Bible, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2937/kjv/tr/0-1/.
[7] Bible Study Tools, https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/phusis.html.
[8] Plato's philosophy that considered the world of forms as superior to the sensible world and the teachings of the Gnostics verged on the dualism that the unseen is superior to the physical and mundane.

theology. If Judeo-Christian scriptures ascribe this importance and vitality to creation, Christian communities certainly can be more intentional and affectionately responsible in engaging nature for their well-being.

Sensitive immersion in nature through intentional engagement with its element, as in community gardening, over against intensive and mechanistic exploitation, may be more rewarding and regenerative of human and environment interaction, both for now and for the future. Such awareness will enrich the emerging practices of contemporary Christian eco-theologies often glibly rooted in the stewardship motif. Such a liberating motif of heartfelt, creative engagement may be more beneficial and impactful for the flourishing of humanity and the rest of creation. And it will be a recovery of our primal understanding of the ecological environment as our caring home.

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Appendix A
Initial Letter of Introduction

July 29, 2021

The Program Officer
(Agency)

Dear Madam/Sir:

Study Title: Ecology and Human Flourishing

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW YOUR CLIENTS

My name is Kehinde Olabimtan. I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate of eco-theology at St. Stephen's College, University of Alberta Campus. I am doing a research study on the topic above. I am aware your clients participate in the agricultural activities at Lady Flower Gardens. Please, may I be allowed to interview participants who are willing to share their experiences in interacting with nature in the company of their peers?

The Research seeks to understand how human service agencies utilize the ecological environment to bolster the ongoing recovery of their clients. My primary interest is in understanding the meaning of their lived experiences from participating in the garden.

If you approve my request, I am happy to follow-up with your coordinator of garden activities to contact prospective participants.

Please note that the plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Office at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, please contact the Research Ethics Office at 780.492.2615.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Kehinde Olabimtan
St. Stephen's College
University of Alberta Campus
8810 – 112 Street, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2J6
Mobile No.: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Appendix B
Participant's Consent Form

St Stephen's College

University of Alberta Campus 8810 112 Street NW Edmonton Alberta CANADA T6G 2J6
phone 780 439 7311 **toll free** (Canada only) 1 800 661 4956 **fax** 780 433 8875
email st.stephens@ualberta.ca **website** www.ualberta.ca/st-stephens

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Ecology and Human Flourishing

Researcher: Kehinde Olabimtan
St. Stephen's College, University of Alberta Campus, Edmonton
Mobile No: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Supervisor: Leslie Gardner
St. Stephen's College, University of Alberta Campus, Edmonton
Mobile No: zzz-zzz-zzzz

Dear Volunteer,

This research study is about gardening at Therapolis Gardens in Western Canada.
I am a student at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, and I am inviting you to be part of this study with me. Before you say yes or no, I will go over this form with you. Please ask questions if you need me to explain anything. You will get a copy of this form.

What is the reason for doing the study?

I want to know the different ways gardening with friends might be good for you. How does being outside and in nature make you feel? What does it mean to you? Your answers will contribute to my dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Ministry. But more than that, it will encourage more human service agencies to use community gardening to support people's health and social life.

What will you be asked to do?

In this study, I will ask you a few questions about your gardening at Lady Flower Gardens with your friends. If you agree, I will make a recording of the interview to make it easier to return to what you said. It will take about 60-90 minutes. You will have the questions with you days before the interview so you can be prepared. We may have the interview at your agency's office at an agreed time. You do not have to answer any question you do not like. What you tell me will be part of my study for my degree only and not for any other studies.

What are the risks and discomforts to you?

I do not expect any risks or discomforts to you while you take part in this study. It is not possible to know all of the risks that may happen in a study. However, I have taken all reasonable safeguards to

minimize any known risks. And if you are uncomfortable during the interview, we can stop and ask for help.

What are the benefits to you?

I do not expect any direct benefit to you from being in this research study. However, this study may help other people who might need the kind of opportunity you have at Lady Flower Gardens in the future.

Do you have to take part in the study?

No. Being in this study is your choice. I do not expect you to pay for participating in it. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any time. It will not affect your continuing with activities at Lady Flower Gardens. You have up to 14 days after you look at and approve the typed notes from your interview to stop being in the study. If you stop being in the study, the notes from your interview will be destroyed.

Will you be paid to be in the research?

Yes. If you decide to be in the study, you will receive a total of $40 cash for your time and trouble. You will receive $20 after the interview, and the second $20 after you look at and approve the typed notes from the interview. If you withdraw from the study before the end of the interview, you will still receive your $20. If you withdraw after approving the typed notes of the interview, you will be allowed to keep your $40.

Will your information be kept private?

Yes. The typed notes from this interview will NOT contain any mention of your name, or any other names from the interview. I want people who will see the report from the study to hear what you have to say but under a made-up name. That way, nobody will know who said what. Any quotes from your interview that I use will be given that made-up name. To keep what you say private and confidential, I will keep the electronic record of your voice recording protected with a password only I know. The typed interview notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only I will have access to the interviews until the study is completely finished. After that, I will follow the rules that say information has to be kept for 5 years at St. Stephen's College in a secure vault. It will be destroyed after 5 years' time by the College.

What if you have questions?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact me, Kehinde Olabimtan, on xxx-xxx-xxxx, or the Research Supervisor, Leslie Gardner, on zzz-zzz-zzzz. A Research Ethics Board has reviewed the plan for this study at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, call 780-492-2615. This office is independent of my supervisor and me.

Kehinde Olabimtan

St Stephen's College
University of Alberta Campus 8810 112 Street NW Edmonton Alberta CANADA T6G 2J6
phone 780 439 7311 toll free (Canada only) 1 800 661 4956 fax 780 433 8875
email st.stephens@ualberta.ca website www.ualberta.ca/st-stephens

CONSENT

Title of Study: Ecology and Human Flourishing
Researcher: Kehinde Olabimtan Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Research Supervisor: Leslie Gardner Phone Number: zzz-zzz-zzzz

	Yes	No
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	☐	☐
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	☐	☐
Do you understand that you are free to leave the study at any time, without giving a reason and without affecting your privileges and without penalty?	☐	☐
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	☐	☐
Do you understand who will have access to your study records?	☐	☐
Do you agree to be contacted for follow-up to look at the interview notes?	☐	☐

Who explained this study to you? _____

I agree to take part in this study:

Signature of Research Participant _____

(Printed Name) _____

Date: _____

Signature of Witness _____

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.
Signature of Investigator or Designee _____ Date _____

THE INFORMATION SHEET MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS CONSENT FORM AND A COPY GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Appendix C
Interview Questions Guide

Ecology and Human Flourishing: Discovery Learning in a Community Garden

Interview Questions Guide

(For Participants)

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview. It serves the purpose of academic research on the experiences of participants in the gardening activities at --- Edmonton, Alberta. I am interested in your honest answers about your experiences in participating in the activities of the garden. Your answers are completely private and confidential.

Participant's Chosen Identifier: _____

Questions

1. Can you tell me something about yourself?

2. What motivates you to come to the garden?

3. What do you like best about coming to Lady Flower Gardens?

4. What feelings do you have when you are coming to the gardens?

5. Why do you feel that way?

6. Which of these feelings do you like most

7. What are the three most interesting experiences you have had since you have been coming to the garden?
a.
b.
c.

8. What made the experiences interesting for you?

9. What important things have you learned from being in the garden.

10. What will you miss most if you are not able to visit the garden again?

11. In what ways do you think your life has changed because of coming to the garden?

12. Do you have any additional comments about participating in gardening at Lady Flower Gardens?

Thank you!

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