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SACRED EARTH: THE ROLE OF THE NATURAL DIVINE WITHIN WENDELL

BERRY'S "MANIFESTO"

by

T. Greyson Gurley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

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Logan, Utah

2022

“Like any young person, you need to know, and you will be relieved when you know, the work that you are called to do. That will be the work that you would rather do than any other, the work you will be completed by and that you will be happy in doing.”

—Wendell Berry in a 2021 letter to Greyson Gurley

ABSTRACT

Sacred Earth: The Role of the Natural Divine within Wendell Berry's "Manifesto"

by

T. Greyson Gurley, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2022

Major Professor: Dr. Joyce Kinkead
Department: English

Kentuckian writer and poet, Wendell Berry, is often associated with environmental literature and advocacy. However, often overlooked, much of Berry's work is inherently religious in nature, specifically Christian. Berry's poetry expresses many of his personal beliefs regarding life, spirituality, religion, interconnection, stewardship, and agriculture. In particular, Berry often uses characters to communicate these aforementioned personal ideas. This practice can be seen through his utilization of the character of the Mad Farmer within a great deal of his poetry, including poetry dedicated to the Mad Farmer himself. Although this character expresses many of the same beliefs as Berry, he is not a literary embodiment of Berry but rather Berry's alter ego—a medium in which to freely communicate his grievances with modern society. Arguably, the most famous of Berry's "Mad Farmer" poems is that of "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front." Much of the research regarding this poem is directed towards the speaker of the poem, the character of the Mad Farmer, and the social commentary that he provides. Although the Mad Farmer comments on a variety of societal issues and provides many "Berryian" solutions, the encouragement of individual

responsibility guided by the sacredness of the natural world cannot be overlooked. Within this thesis, I assert the spiritual and religious function of the natural world within the poem and how devotion to the earth can guide an individual's sense of spirituality or religiosity. I also indicate how the call to return to an ecological homeostasis by way of environmental stewardship and responsible agriculture is presented as a form of worship. Through "Manifesto," it seems as if Berry is working toward and communicating an ideal version of Christianity that encompasses his own personal values and beliefs—perhaps even a "Berryian" version of Christianity. This "Berryian" version of Christianity is dominated by the central idea that in order to properly worship the Creator, one must protect the Creator's most sacred creation: earth and its inhabitants. "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," is a call to action for its readers to accept the Christian responsibility of caring for the land in order to "practice resurrection" and participate in their own salvation.

(50 pages)

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I cannot express my gratitude enough for my family and their continuous support and understanding. Your thoughts and prayers for me have sustained my journey. Namely, I would like to thank my mother, Jovanna Gurley. Because of your encouragement and love, I have pursued and accomplished my dreams. The person I am today is because of the mother you are. I am especially so appreciative to my Creator and God for His unwavering love, support, and inspiration.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to the legacy of my maternal grandfather, Bill Rhyne, the original “Mad Farmer.” The completion of this study was directly inspired by his life and the beliefs he upheld.

PREFACE

On the cusp of its 50th anniversary, Wendell Berry's 57-line poem, entitled, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" (1973), endures not only as political and social commentary of the Western World but functions as a call to action for its reader, as well. This call to action is reminiscent of perhaps the most famous manifesto, *The Communist Manifesto*, authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. Within "Manifesto," Berry not only critiques the trappings of modern society but also instructs readers on the ways in which one should live. This indictment of society is told through the speaker of the poem: the Mad Farmer. The Mad Farmer is truly "mad"¹ both in expression and perception. The Mad Farmer is angry with humanity because of the misuse and disrespect of God's sacred creation: the earth. However, the Mad Farmer is perceived and labeled as "mad" or "crazy" because of the radical ideas that he is urging the reader to believe in and act on, that are contrary to cultural norms. This anger or madness is what compels the Mad Farmer to create a manifesto: to liberate the minds of those willing to listen. The acknowledgement of the nature of the character of the Mad Farmer is pertinent to an understanding of "Manifesto." This instruction on the pursuit of a noble and intentional life given to the reader is explored throughout this thesis in relation to the spiritual nature of the poem.

This exploration of "Manifesto" and the character of the Mad Farmer is heavily inspired by my maternal grandfather, Bill Rhyne. Many years prior to the development of this thesis, I was introduced to Berry's character of the Mad Farmer and the poetry he is

¹ Within today's culture, the word "mad" is considered ablest language. It is acknowledged that this poem is almost 50 years old, and the exploration of the idea "madness," takes this fact into consideration.

featured in. In particular, “Manifesto” stood out to me because the beliefs expressed within the poem regarding nature, religion, and spirituality greatly aligned with the beliefs that my grandfather held. My grandfather was a very religious man, but he communed with God or the Divine through his continual stewardship of the land. The earth and all of its creatures were sacred to Bill. Throughout his life, many within his church community perceived him to be “mad” because of his lack of “traditional” religiosity. In the end, my grandfather felt that organized religion had failed him and instead, the care of his land was his worship. His farm was his church. Much like the character of the Mad Farmer, my grandfather found the best way to commune with and worship his God was to take care of His creation.

Throughout the past 50 years, “Manifesto” has remained pertinent to cultural, social, and political conversations within a constantly evolving literary world and cultural landscape. There has been much study on Berry’s writings, yet the character of the Mad Farmer and “Manifesto” remain underexplored. The intention for this thesis is not only to conduct an exploration but also contribute to the collective knowledge of Berry’s body of work. My thesis anticipates the actual 50th anniversary in 2023, and I plan to revise the thesis for publication in time for this date.

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front
by Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.
So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.
Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion — put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful

though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?
Go with your love to the fields.
Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

Wendell Berry (born 1934) is a native Kentuckian author of over eighty books of poetry, fiction, and essays. Born into an agricultural society, Berry's family, including his father, has been farming tobacco in Henry County, Kentucky for seven generations. Originally, Berry did not continue with the tradition of farming but instead pursued higher education, eventually completing his master's at University of Kentucky (1957) and attending Stanford University's creative writing program as a Wallace Stegner Fellow (1958). Although Berry first gained literary recognition through his poetry in the early 1970s, Berry began to publish both poetry and novels in the early 1960s, including his first, *Nathan Coulter* (1960). During his literary rise, Berry travelled through Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship and taught English at New York University, yet Berry chose to return home in 1965 to Port Royal, Kentucky. Berry not only continued to write and publish literature and teach at the University of Kentucky, but like his forefathers, began to farm.

Berry's writings, including his poetry, serve as an embodiment of the life he values and express what I term as "Berryian" ideals. These ideals, include the following:

- an upheaval of the degradation of modern society and the rejection of the assumption of the superiority of technological advancement
- the safeguarding of the individual against the government
- the preservation of nature and the return to ecological homeostasis
- the promotion of the grandeur of ordinary life
- an insistence on community and gaining an intimate knowledge of home.

In alignment with these values and “Berryian ideals,” overarching themes Berry expands on and refers to within his body of work include that of the importance and promotion of community, good work, sustainable agriculture, environmental awareness, animal husbandry, spirituality, and connection to place.

Many of these values and themes found in Berry’s work are interdependent; however, Berry is foremost understood to be a writer of environmental texts that focus on ecological stewardship, land management, and the careful preservation of the natural world. Berry’s work often praises the joys that can be found through a connection with the earth and berates those that defile the land. However, Berry not only offers philosophical commentary on the importance of responsible stewardship but provides solutions, some even hard to swallow. Although Berry is a highly distinguished scholar, a recipient of the National Humanities Medal (2011) and a Guggenheim fellow (1961), much of his writing is informed by his personal experiences as a practicing farmer, landowner, and livestock husbandman. Berry’s arguably best-known work, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture*, is based upon his involvement with sustainable agriculture as a small local farmer of upwards of 40 years. Not only does Berry continue to practice farming but also practices advocacy for local farmers.

Although Berry is primarily associated with environmentalism and agricultural activism, many of Berry’s writings, both through explicit intent and interpretation, are inherently spiritual and religious. Berry, a self-identified Christian, has written specifically religious texts that are in alignment with Christian belief. These directly religious texts include the aptly titled anthologies *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997* and *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems (2014)*. Many of these poems

incorporate both Christian and natural imagery and ideas, often acting as a mode of worship. Even this secular work often has a spiritual component to it as well and can be interpreted as a spiritual or religious text. These interpreted secular texts not only can function as spiritual guide, but also exhibit the aforementioned distinct “Berryian ideals.” Within this thesis, religiosity is defined as a specific set of organized beliefs and practices dictated by a higher group; whereas spirituality is interpreted as the practice of an individual belief and a focus on self-introspection. Berry’s works often explore both religious and spiritual ideas and can be labeled as such. Within this exploration, I do not intend for spirituality and religiosity to be synonymous. However, I do affirm that these concepts are greatly interrelated, and both are presented within “Manifesto.”

Within both his secular and religious works, the literary characters often embody and uphold Berry’s values and ideals or showcase the consequences of moral failings by Berry’s standard. One of these characters, dubbed the “Mad Farmer,” appears in several poems beginning in 1968 with his debut in, “The Mad Farmer Revolution.” Berry’s inclusion of the character Mad Farmer in his work continued, both explicitly and implicitly. Not only does the Mad Farmer appear in eponymous poetry centered around him but also often manifests himself as male farmer characters in Berry’s novels, including being anticipated in his first appearance as Nathan Coulter in *Nathan Coulter* (1960), and then Jack Beechum in *The Memory of Old Jack* (1974), and Andy Catlett in *Remembering* (1988). Although these characters are not exact depictions of the Mad Farmer, they do uphold many of the values that the Mad Farmer puts forth.

Although many may claim or interpret the Mad Farmer to be a literary expression of Berry himself, the Mad Farmer is a distinct character in his own right, separate from

Berry. Within the introduction of the 2013 edition of the collection of *The Mad Farmer Poems*, novelist and compatriot of Berry, Ed McClanahan explains the distinctness of the Mad Farmer. “There are [some] who suppose that the Mad Farmer is a one-for-one autobiographical iteration of the poet himself. Not so... Nor is he Wendell’s spokesman...The Mad Farmer is fairly bursting with opinions of his own, and would never deign to be someone else’s mouthpiece, not even Wendell’s” (McClanahan). McClanahan continues to explain the nature and relation of the Mad Farmer to Berry. He writes, “Sometimes, [the Mad Farmer] does fill in as Wendell’s alter ego, sometimes as his alter id, sometimes as his mischievous—but never evil—twin... The Mad Farmer is, in short, not Wendell but a hatchling of Wendell’s fecund imagination” (McClanahan).

Berry’s collection, *The Mad Farmer Poems*, is comprised of thirteen poems with both secular and religious tones, including:

- “The Man Born to Farming”
- “The Farmer among the Tombs”
- “The Mad Farmer Revolution”
- “The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer”
- “The Mad Farmer in the City”
- “Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer”
- “The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer”
- “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”
- “The Mad Farmer Manifesto: The First Amendment”
- “The Mad Farmer’s Love Song”
- “The Reassurer”

- “The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union”
- “While Attending the Annual Convocation of Cause Theorists and Bigbangists at the Local Provincial Research University, the Mad Farmer Intercedes from the Back Row”

Not only does the collection of Mad Farmer poems express the Mad Farmer’s views and the arc of the Mad Farmer’s “life” but also functions as social commentary on a multitude of subjects. This commentary includes the promotion of the values and “Berryian” ideals. Many of these topics are subject matter that Berry directly addresses in the majority of his work, both in the Mad Farmer collection and other writings. Although, Berry cannot be equated with the Mad Farmer, nor are they one in the same, it can be argued by their similarities that both Berry and the Mad Farmer share a similar world view, albeit they might express their views in different manners. With that understanding, Berry’s work outside the collection of the Mad Farmer, including essays, poetry, interviews, and various speeches, can be used to comprehend the entirety of “Manifesto” and the character of the Mad Farmer.

In partial, this thesis is dedicated to understanding the Mad Farmer and his beliefs, particularly his religious and spiritual beliefs. Although some of the other works in the collection will be referenced, this examination will focus on the one poem, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”² (1973). Not only is “Manifesto” the most popular poem amongst the collection, but I claim that it also provides the reader with the most comprehensive picture of who the Mad Farmer is and what he believes in.

² “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front” is located in the preface.

Although the poem focuses on a wide range of issues, “Manifesto” exhibits distinct “Berryian” philosophies about the intersection and interconnectedness of divinity and nature. The natural world or nature not only functions as a religious figure within the world of the “Mad Farmer,” but also becomes the basis for the promotion of an ecologically guided sense of morality or responsibility. For this interpretation, I affirm that the Mad Farmer is the speaker within “Manifesto,” and the reference to one is a reference to the other.

Within my thesis, I will make two arguments regarding Berry’s “Manifesto” and its encouragement of individual responsibility guided by the sacredness of the natural world. It can be affirmed that the majority of Berry’s writings are inherently spiritual, and most often this spirituality or religiosity is understood to be of Christian nature. “Manifesto” is no exception. Not only can “Manifesto” be understood to have religious and spiritual themes, such as resurrection, but it perpetuates these themes through the continuation of “Berryian” ideals, more specifically the ideal of environmental stewardship and sustainable agriculture.

In the first argument, I will assert the spiritual and religious function of the natural world within the poem and how devotion to this religiosity can guide an individual’s sense of spirituality, particularly the character of the Mad Farmer. Although the poem is not overtly religious, I intend to interpret it as religious, based upon Berry’s ideas put forth by outside works surrounding spirituality and religiosity. I also seek to explore how Berry’s own personal spirituality and his belief surrounding the divine have influenced “Manifesto’s” religious composition and the present theme of the connection between spirituality and nature.

In accordance with this argument, I seek to define and provide greater understanding of the religious experiences of the character of the Mad Farmer. I intend to establish how Berry's belief of the interconnectedness of the natural world and the divine realm was influenced by Christian ideas regarding community and creation. I investigate how traditional Christian beliefs and symbols are used by Berry within "Manifesto" to accomplish his poetic purpose. I accomplish this by not only looking at work that explores the relationship of the convergence of spirituality and the natural world but also writings and work from Berry that discuss religion and spirituality, in particular.

In the second argument, I will indicate how the call to return to an ecological homeostasis by way of environmental stewardship and responsible agriculture within Berry's "Manifesto" is presented as a form of worship. The poem contains promotion of the communion of man and nature, but Berry also promotes sustainable agriculture and stewardship as a vehicle for religious worship. I argue that within "Manifesto," Berry is promoting the idea that mindful stewardship is indeed a form of worship, but I also intend to affirm the idea put forth that this worship is a way, arguably the best way, to draw closer to God³ or the divine. "Manifesto" is an all-encompassing synthesis of not only Berry's beliefs about the convergence of the divine and the natural world, but also Berry's beliefs regarding the importance of harmony between agriculture and nature. The result is a poem that expresses the importance of the harmony between agriculture and spirituality.

Although there has been much scholarship on Berry's fiction, prose, and poetry regarding the role of the divine and Berry's religious beliefs, no academic study on

³ The terms God, the Divine, and Creator will be used interchangeably throughout.

“Manifesto” has found how nature fills the role of the divine. Within this thesis, I will demonstrate how the integration of the natural world and religion are portrayed within “Manifesto” in order to communicate Berry and the Mad Farmer’s beliefs surrounding spirituality and the way in which this guides their respective senses of morality. This will fill the aforementioned scholarly gap.

CHAPTER II: Berry's Spirituality

Having been described as both a modern-day prophet and a heretic, Berry is a unique voice within the religious and Christian literature genre that often cannot be classified (McDuff). Although at times Berry has been ambiguous about his religious status and some of his early work was considered at times holding paganist views, Berry firmly embraces traditional Christianity, and this is reflected within his work (Laytham). Christianity as defined as the practice of one following and adhering to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ—and believing Him to be the Creator of the world. The confusion surrounding Berry's religious identity not only results from his ambiguity or earlier works, but perhaps also how he receives religious inspiration and from what sources. Within his academic article entitled, "Embedded Hopefulness: Wendell Berry and Saint Thomas Aquinas on Christian Hope," Philip A. Muntzel discusses Berry's imaginative approach to theological revelation and how this practice of embracing and embedding religious syncretism in and outside of his work does not negate Berry's Christianity. He writes:

An exploration of Berry's imaginative vision of the holy must first acknowledge his refusal to reference only Christian sources. Berry ranges widely over religious and nonreligious sources to explain the integrated reciprocities he portrays. Chinese, Islamic, and especially Buddhist allusions dot his works. But this openness does not result in some amorphous spirituality or hydra-headed religious eclecticism." (200)

Although Berry accepts other ideas of thoughts, he firmly embraces the religion in which he was “born to,” as he claims within his essay, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation” (95-96).

Regarding his faith, Berry describes himself as a staunch supporter of Christianity, in the truest sense. He acknowledges that he is a “Christian both by chance of birth and by choice of conviction”; however, Berry seldom gives the modern practice of Christianity his approval (Laytham). Although Berry identifies as Christian, a certain alienation exists between his beliefs and practices and those of mainstream Christianity. Describing himself as a “marginal” Christian and positioning himself on the outskirts of the dominant culture, Berry intentionally separates himself from all that he believes to be contrary from a true practice of Christianity. Within his essay, “Proper Work: Wendell Berry and the Practice of Ministry,” Pastor Kyle Childress describes Berry’s religious detachment through Berry’s “church-going” experience. Childress, paraphrasing Berry, writes, “Berry says that he often sits on the same pew alongside his grandchildren that he sat on alongside his grandfather when he was a boy, yet his relationship with the church is sometimes like that of his fictional Jayber Crow, who attends church but sits in the back pew” (72).

Berry believes in a Christian practice that honors its Creator by honoring creation: Earth and its inhabitants. Not only does Berry not adhere to how a Christian “should” act or traditional Christian beliefs but as Joel James Shuman writes, Berry is often explicitly critical of Christianity in his work, especially regarding the “complicity of modern North American Christianity in the violent exploitation of the earth and its inhabitants by consumer capitalism and military-industrialism” (2). The idea that Berry is often

interpreted as a non-Christian writer is almost ironic in that Berry is arguably one of the most Christian writers, because of his commitment to faithful stewardship over God's creation.⁴ Within his book *What Are People For?*, Berry writes in the essay "God and Country," regarding the modern hypocritical Christian.

One must ask, then: is this state of affairs caused by Christian truth or by the failures and errors of Christian practice? My answer is that it is caused by the failures and errors of Christian practice. The evident ability of most church leaders to be 'born again in Christ' without in the least discomfoting their faith in the industrial economy's bill of goods, however convenient and understandable it may be, is not scriptural. (98)

Berry's version of Christianity might be uncomfortable or off-putting for many modern Christians, yet in Berry's eyes, this is the only way of truly worshipping God.

Understandably, the assumption that Berry prefers an individualistic approach to religion or spirituality appears as if it might be true. However, this is a partial truth; Berry does indeed disapprove of hierarchal and institutional religion, but Berry also believes and supports the act of going to and participating in church because of the love of community. However, to make matters more complex, Berry believes organized religion to be the enemy of local communities because of institutional religion, such as the Catholic church's need to organize and classify populations without understanding their people. Within his academic article, "What Would a Christian University Look Like? Some Tentative Answers Inspired by Wendell Berry," theologian Stanley Hauerwas describes Berry's distaste for institutional religion. Hauerwas writes that the alternative to

⁴ Within this thesis, ecological stewardship is seen as a form of worship.

the confusion of institutionalized Christianity is to embrace community at the local level (26). It is alluded to in Hauerwas's work that many Christians participate in religion to absolve their mind of guilt, yet they do not actually participate in the building of communities, which is true worship.

Within his study of Berry, Minister and Elder D. Brent Laytham writes that, "Berry is more likely the prophet decrying our abuses than the spiritual guide directing our souls" (Laytham). Although many might dismiss Berry as a dangerous freethinker in the religious space, Berry might be the answer to a proclaimed Christian world that practices non-Christian values, such as the destruction of the Creator's creation.

CHAPTER III: Interconnectedness and Christian Creation

As noted, Berry upholds and believes in the importance of community. However, this belief goes beyond the health of local neighborhoods and groups, Berry believes that all are community members of the natural world. As such, every member within the community is interrelated; therefore, all must be in harmony with nature in order to have a stable community. Within *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture*, Berry acknowledges the complexity of the world, but Berry also understands the mutual reciprocity between the parts (us) and the whole (creation). Berry simply states, “Each part is connected to every other part” (110).

Although the accepted and embraced Western viewpoint is that all are independent creatures, Berry argues within his essay “The Body and the Earth,” that despite the continual denial that everything is interconnected, all of life is co-dependent. He writes, “These things that appear to be distinct are nevertheless caught in a network of mutual dependence and influence that is the substantiation of their unity. Body, soul (or mind or spirit), community, and world all are susceptible to each other’s influence” (110). If the result of the preservation of a community is interconnectedness, non-dependence or autonomy severs the connection with creation and therefore God. Berry writes in “Notes: Unspecializing Poetry” (1983), that “to be autonomous is to be ‘broken off’ and separate” (Berry). Attempting to separate oneself from the whole of creation only weakens the community and endangers the connection that one has.

However, many individuals that are inherently creatures and parts of a whole forget that all are interconnected or perhaps choose to disconnect themselves and disrupt the harmony of creation because of the inclination for personal freedom. This disconnect

or willing isolation from communities has become the degradation of one's very soul. Within her academic article, "The Pill Is Like... DDT?" farmer Elizabeth Bahnson describes the importance of the harmony of created beings. She writes, "Effectively thinking ourselves gods... we have [forgotten] that we are a small part of creation and dependent on the whole of creation to survive. This forgetfulness leads to isolation because it allows us to live under the illusion that we are independent, disconnected beings who can and should pursue our individual self-interests at all costs" (88).

Within his essay, "Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community," Berry writes about the fairly recent Western need for freedom and autonomy and how this need actually hinders the progression of true freedom. Berry explains that the problem is the emphasis on the importance of individual liberty, and this emphasis has made the freedom of community not possible (147-155). The more humanity collectively pursues individual liberty the more selfish all become as a society. This selfishness limits the progression of communities. Hauerwas also comments on the negative effects of individual liberty that Berry writes about. "Paradoxically, as a result, the more the emphasis has been on individual freedom, the less liberty and power have been available to most individuals" (22).

As alluded to previously, choosing personal freedom over engaging with communities is perhaps selfish, or rather actively choosing to belong to a community is unselfish. Not only is supporting communities unselfish, but Berry also believes that all have a Christian responsibility to live in harmony with and care for community members. As Berry reminds the reader within "The Body and the Earth," "interdependences are

fundamental to our lives as creatures” (280-81). Humanity is all connected, interconnected, and reliant upon one another.

This idea of protecting community and helping one’s neighbor is inherently part of the Christian faith. Within the New Testament⁵ in the book of Matthew, chapter 22, Jesus is asked by the Pharisees, what is the greatest commandment? Jesus responds that the first great commandment is to love God, and, “the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39). The benevolent treatment of those within communities is not only righteous or virtuous by Christian standards, but it is also present in much of Berry’s work, including in “Manifesto.” Within the first half of “Manifesto,” the speaker, presumed to be the Mad Farmer, is explaining the current state of the Western World and the lives of those that adhere to the Western cultural norms.

Lines 1-11 read:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
 vacation with pay. Want more
 of everything ready-made. Be afraid
 to know your neighbors and to die.
 And you will have a window in your head.
 Not even your future will be a mystery
 any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
 and shut away in a little drawer.

⁵ For this interpretation, I will use the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. Within his essay, “The Burden of the Gospels,” Berry notes that the King James Version is the translation that he prefers and uses for his own interpretations.

When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

Although these lines focus on emphasizing and showcasing the degradation or the loss of values or morality of Western society and perhaps as a warning to all of those adhering to this lifestyle, these lines also function as a display of the isolation, masked as independence, that is heavily present within this society. Perhaps the most obvious reference to this lack of community occurs in lines 3 and 4, that read, “Be afraid/ to know your neighbors and to die.” The western practice of isolating oneself not only disrupts the progression of communities and camaraderie, but it goes against the law of God to “love thy neighbour as thyself.” Thus, it can be argued that this continuation of destructive autonomy can be interpreted as sinful in a Christian sense. This isolation is not only unrighteous by Christian standards but can be contributed to the modern advances of present society. Within his academic article entitled, “Mr. Berry Goes to Medical School,” physician and writer Brian Volck discusses the continuation of this specific disconnect within the current culture. He writes, “The unstated price of our autonomy is an estranging solitude, a loneliness hidden even from ourselves by the diverting entertainments of iPods, video games, and cyberporn” (38). This “estranging solitude” perpetuated through technology and materialism is warned against by the Mad Farmer. This cautionary message within lines 2-3 and 9-11 respectively reads, “Want more/ of everything ready-made,” “When they want you to buy something/ they will call you. When they want you/ to die for profit they will let you know.”

Not only is this warning communicated through the lines of the poem, but also the careful “placing” of the line breaks. Throughout the poem, often the line purposefully breaks in the middle of a sentence or phrase in order to communicate a two-fold meaning. Line two ends with the beginning of a sentence. It reads, “Want more.” This sentence is then finished in the following line, “of everything ready-made.” This is also seen in line three that ends with the beginning of a sentence, “Be afraid.” The closing of the sentence in the following line reads, “to know your neighbors and to die.” These intentional line breaks function both as an explanation of Western practices and in a way, direct commands from this society. By understanding the Christian importance and duty of community and interconnection, “Manifesto” can be interpreted as a uniquely religious text. By heeding “Manifesto’s,” warnings against isolation and autonomy, one not only understands what the Mad Farmer is against but how one can increase their own spirituality.

However, this Christian duty to protect community, interconnection, and harmony extends beyond interpersonal relationships to the protection of the natural world and all of creation. As established, all individuals are community members of the natural world, and everyone and every creation is interrelated. Thus, it can be concluded that protecting the natural world community is virtuous by Christian and “Berryian” standards. However, in order to protect the communities of the natural world and the natural world itself, as Bahnson explains humans must return to the “status of creature, and thus, reconnected to everything in creation” (89). Within Christianity, this idea of embracing the status of creature or part of creation emerges from the creation origin story. However, as Bahnson notes, there are two creation stories within Genesis that when paired together

indicate that, “while we have a share in divinity on one side, we are also connected to the fertile soil on the other” (91). The two creation stories found respectively in Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:7, read as follows:

Genesis 1:26-27: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominions over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 2:7: And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

In the first creation story, God created man in his own image therefore insinuating man is somewhat God-like. However, in the second creation story, man is created from the “dust of the ground” or perhaps humus or the earth. This version of the creation serves as a reminder to humans that all came from the earth and will return once again. As Bahnson reminds readers, “Thus, while humans are to rule the earth as God would, representing God’s interest in the world, they are also of the earth and dependent on it for life. God and the soil are the sources of human life—both at the beginning and for the rest of the story” (91). By understanding the creation story, one can understand their humble place in all of creation.

As previously noted, Bahnson in her article, “The Pill is Like ... DDT?,” discusses the central biblical vision that all humans are creatures and God alone is creator. Bahnson explains that through the acceptance and acknowledgement that humans

are creatures and operate as creatures, not only can one discover that they themselves are connected to everything else in creation, but one understands that their connection with God is influenced by their relationships with other creations, human and non-human (90-91). Within her book, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*, religious scholar and theologian Ellen Davis discusses these synergistic relationships that creatures have to one another. She writes, “The biblical writers... help us see the degree to which our relationship with God is bound up in our relationships with the other creatures whom God has made” (183). Thus, the very connection humans have to the divine is in relation to their interconnection and interdependence with other humans and the natural world around them—this promotes the conclusion that to be in harmony with divinity, one must treat the natural world with respect.

Within “Manifesto,” these Christian ideas regarding the community of creation and humanity’s role in creation are present throughout the poem. Lines 12-16, read as follows, “So, friends, every day do something/ that won’t compute. Love the Lord./ Love the world. Work for nothing./ Take all that you have and be poor./ Love someone who does not deserve it.” Within these lines, the idea that loving the Lord and loving the world is in a way almost comparable and intertwined. If one loves the Lord, they must also love the world; reciprocally, to love the Lord, one must take care of the world. To love the world, as previously established, communities must also be maintained. Therefore, to show devotion to the Lord, one must establish and maintain relationships and one must “love someone who does not deserve it.”

“Manifesto” also explores and promotes the idea that the creation of humanity is intertwined with and interdependent on the natural world. Within lines 31-36, the circular

and synergistic nature of life is presented to the reader. These lines read, “Put your faith in the two inches of humus/ that will build under the trees/ every thousand years./ Listen to carrion—put your ear/ close, and hear the faint chattering/ of the songs that are to come.” Within these lines, the Mad Farmer is insinuating that all humanity was born of the earth, the actual soil, and one day all will return. “Manifesto” presents life as a cycle—there is no life without death. Carrion, decaying flesh, is not seen as the end of a life but rather the start of a new one. This concept of cyclical life is also exemplified within “Manifesto’s” sanctification of those in charge of earthly creation of life: women. Within lines 41-45, this regard held for women’s abilities is demonstrated:

So as long as women do not go cheap
 for power, please women more than men
 Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
 a woman satisfied to bear a child?
 Will this disturb the sleep
 of a woman near to giving birth?

Within “Manifesto,” women are highly revered and respected because they are a vital part of the continuation of life and birth. Women represent rebirth and the renewal of the earth. However, it is acknowledged that “Manifesto” does indeed promote traditional gender roles, including that of motherhood for women. Although many might critique Berry for a narrow view, this view of the importance of motherhood could also be interpreted as a mode of empowerment for many that choose to engage in motherhood.

“Manifesto’s” last line, a command, encapsulates this idea of an individual contributing to the entire cycle of life. Line 57 reads, “Practice resurrection.” In order to

practice resurrection(s), one must not only have respect for the earth but contribute to the maintenance of the land. Understanding humanity in this aspect allows the reader to gain to respect for the earth, thereby fulfilling the Mad Farmer's purpose: to protect the natural world.

Unfortunately, humans have long treated the earth and natural world with disrespect that borders on sacrilege in Christian terms. Joel James Shuman, taking inspiration from Berry, writes concerning this disregard that human "creatures" have for creation:

It is true that creation has been alienated from its Creator. Life in this world, characterized by exploitation, violence, suffering, sickness, and death, falls well short of the promised Kingdom of God. (3)

However, many Christians might assume that they represent the "Kingdom of God" in an otherwise fallen world. This assumption can be attributed to the ingrained belief in "Manifest Destiny"—the belief that white American Christian settlers were divinely ordained to claim and have dominion over the land in the New World (Kinkead 76). As Shuman continues to explain, Christians are often participating members of the blasphemy that is not caring for the earth.

Christians are called collectively to become Jesus's manifest incarnate presence to creation by working together publicly for creation's good. Indisputably, Christians have not always worked for the common good of creation. Indeed, they have more than occasionally, and not always with good intentions, worked for its destruction. Yet this is an expression not of Christianity but of Christian unfaithfulness, the failure of Christians to

follow in the steps of the one they call *Lord*. That the earth continues abundantly to bless us in spite of these failures is but a sign that God's love exceeds our callousness and ineptitude. (5)

Throughout much of his work, Berry explores the idea that Christians have defiled the earth and condemns those continue to do so. Within lines 21-22 of "Manifesto," the Mad Farmer instructs the reader to "Praise ignorance, for what man/ has not encountered he has not destroyed." According to the Mad Farmer and perhaps Berry, it is often better to remain "ignorant" and protect rather than satisfy "curiosities."

Within his poem, "How to Be a Poet (to Remind Myself)" within the anthology *Given: New Poems* (2006), Berry gives a succinct explanation of the holiness of creation. He writes within stanza two, "There are no unsacred places;/ there are only sacred places/ and desecrated places" (20-21). It is implied that by honoring the sacredness of the natural world, one can increase their own relationship with God.

Although modern Christians are berated by Berry and Shuman on account of the failure to protect God's creation and natural world, both provide a solution for those seeking to engage in righteous behavior with God's creations and increase their spirituality: good work. Within his essay "Healing," Berry discusses the importance of work and explains the purpose of humanity is to perform work. He writes, "Good work, finds the way between pride and despair. It graces with health. It heals with grace. It preserves the given so that it remains a gift" (10). By participating in work, not only does humanity continue to develop in a righteous sense but also it is the way in which one can become more in tune with their spirituality and strengthen their relationships. Shuman also writes on the benefits of turning to work. "It [work] is potentially a source of

pleasure and satisfaction and a means by which humans rightly connect: to their Creator, to each other, and to the rest of creation” (5).

Often in a religious setting when work is mentioned, an individual might think of the “good work” of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ or converting souls unto Christ. However, Berry’s solution of work for troubled and lost souls is actual physical work. Berry is referring to productive and righteous manual labor such as farming, husbandry, and the protective care of land. In regard to work, Berry writes in his essay, “Conservation Is Good Work,” “good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known” (35-36). By working hard and conscientiously, one can know the pleasure and satisfactions of a simple life, much like the Mad Farmer.

CHAPTER IV: Stewardship as Worship

The pursuit of a simple and joyful life is aided by hard and diligent work but also work that protects God's creation of the earth. Within the context of Christianity, this idea of protecting creation is often referred to as stewardship. However, oftentimes many Christians believe that stewardship equates with ownership rather than with responsible supervision. This entitlement may be the result of humanity's proclivity to greed or perhaps a misunderstanding of Christian scripture and teachings.

Concerning their role in relation to the earth, many Christians might point to Genesis chapter 1, verses 26 and 28. Within these verses, God is speaking and repeats a similar phrase in both verses. Verse 26 reads, "Let them [man] have dominion... over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Whereas Verse 28 is as follows, "God said unto them...have dominion...over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This idea put forth in Christianity's religious text that God created the world and then commanded humanity to have dominion over his creation has most certainly given many Christians the idea that they are entitled to complete control over the land, to do with as they please. However, Professor of theology, ecology, and rural life, Norman Wirzba, explains in his academic article "The Dark Night of the Soil," why the common conception of dominion is skewed in the Christian collective mind. He writes:

For centuries, people have assumed that, even though we are creatures, we are, nonetheless, special because God has put us over all other living and nonliving things...we should wonder about claims to 'all-inclusive' dominion, particularly if we take seriously the threefold

incomprehensibility of God, creation, and humanity. If we are serious about living faithfully and attentively with our creatureliness, then we will need to chasten the desire for complete control. (161)

Wirzba implies that in order to truly worship the divine, one must understand that they are simply a part of creation and bridle the human instinct for power.

However, the idea of dominion or responsible supervision still implies that humanity is above nature in the hierarchy of creation. Oftentimes, nature is the force that has power over humanity. Within his essay, “People, Land, and Community,” Berry implies that the good steward will acknowledge “an understanding and acceptance of the human place in the order of Creation—a proper humility” (70). In order to properly worship the land, one must be humble enough to show deference to nature.

An individual can increase their spirituality and connection with God by not only understanding that humanity is simply a creation but also by acknowledging that the land too is a creation from God and divinely made. The land deserves respect and honor because it was intentionally designed by God. Within his article, “Landscapes of Flesh,” Joel James Shuman discusses this righteous appreciation of the land. “The person that realizes that her beloved landscape exists as a member of the entire creation therefore understands that her place, no matter how extensive the history of its belovedness, belongs not to her but to God. She is its steward, charged for a time with its care” (139). By reframing land ownership into caring for one of God’s belongings, a feeling of responsibility and obligation is produced. As Berry writes in his essay, “God and Country,” this feeling of responsibility ensures that the steward will cause the temporary possession no irreparable damage (99). In accordance with the idea of stewardship and

protecting the land being a form of worship, Berry also writes in “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” that being a bad steward and destroying nature is “the most horrid blasphemy” (98). In order to be a good and “God-fearing” Christian, one must be a good steward and serve the land, God’s creation.

This idea that a steward is one that protects, not owns, the land is not a new idea but is founded on teachings within the Old Testament. Returning to theologian Ellen Davis’s book, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*, Davis discusses the relationship that humanity has with the earth and farming. Davis explains that this relationship first began in Eden. Within the Garden, Adam and Eve were sent by God to “watch and work” the land in the garden. These words in Hebrew *avad* and *shamar* are not common farming terms but rather they are used to describe the human relationship with God. In relation to God, *avad* means “worship” and *shamar* means to “watch over.” Thus, the first humans’ responsibility to the land was far beyond simple gardening; they were commanded to worship and watch over God’s land, much like a steward. Regarding this concept, Davis directly writes, “Together, these two verbs outline humanity’s complex relationship with the fertile soil, a relationship that is meant to be deferential, observant, and protective. We must serve (*avad*) the land, not worshipping it but showing it reverence as God’s own creation, respecting it as one whose needs take priority over our immediate desires. We must watch it and watch over it (*shamar*) as one who has something to teach us and yet at the same time needs our vigilant care” (194).

By following the first human’s relationship with the land, one cannot only become a steward, both in the modern and ancient sense— but also by serving and watching over the land, one can worship and commune with the Creator. The idea of the

faithful steward is continuously referred to and promoted within “Manifesto.” It can also be argued that the speaker, the Mad Farmer, himself follows the standards of religious deference and stewardship.

As noted, lines 21-22 of “Manifesto” read, “Praise ignorance, for what man/ has not encountered he has not destroyed.” These lines not only direct the reader to restrain their curiosities regarding creation but also imply that all that man encounters, he destroys. The “natural man” or the part of humanity that is not connected with the divine is inherently destructive. Therefore, in order to combat the moral failings of humanity, one must connect with God through stewardship, a form of worship.

The idea of the forethinking and religiously in tune steward is also presented and encouraged in lines 24-33:

Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.

Say that your main crop is the forest

that you did not plant,

that you will not live to harvest.

Say that the leaves are harvested

when they have rotted into the mold.

Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus

that will build under the trees

every thousand years.

These lines indicate the shift in the poem from societal critique and beratement to steward instruction and explanation regarding creation. Although these lines will be further

explored regarding their agricultural nature in the succeeding section, these lines also indicate and address the proper role of the steward within creation. By instructing the reader to “invest” in a future that they will never see or “plant” and “harvest” a crop that they will not benefit from— only the natural world will, it is affirmed that in order to be a steward for the earth, one must be selfless.

This thread of selflessness is the very basis of “Manifesto” and is presented throughout the poem and everything the Mad Farmer seeks to accomplish. In order to worship God and become a steward, one must think outside of oneself and make sacrifices.

CHAPTER V: Sustainable Agriculture as Worship

Returning to the idea of the disconnect that the inclination for personal freedom produces, this freedom not only disconnects one from community or the divine but also enables one to not sacrifice. As Bahnson notes, sacrifice is needed in order to connect with the land. She writes, “There is a divinely ordained relationship between human and the land that is marked by servanthood, observance, and protection” (93). However, in order for one to feel like they are able to sacrifice for the divine, they must love the Creator’s creation of the land. The love of land and the love of place is necessary in order to properly protect God’s creation, thereby worshipping Him. Within Berry’s novel, *Hannah Coulter* (2004), the character of Hannah believes that the love of land and a particular place can not only join heaven and earth but provide and facilitate a direct connection between an individual and the divine. Within his academic article, “The Membership Includes the Dead,” D. Brent Laytham explores the character of Hannah’s love and what this love provides for her. He writes, “Continuing to love the place keeps her [Hannah] connected with those, now gone, whom she has loved there and connects her too with the God whose love creates all things” (176). By loving the land, Hannah has not only a connection with God but also with heaven—making her land, a literal heaven on earth.

The idea to converge both heaven and earth through the love of land would arguably be an enticing concept for most Christians; however, one may ask how they might show this love for the land. According to the teachings of Berry, in order to love a place, one must acknowledge the land as a unique beloved entity, understand it intimately, and allow oneself to be governed by that place. Within Joel James Shuman’s,

“Landscapes of Flesh,” he writes about the way in which one must love their land. “To love a particular place is to use it suitably and with the acknowledgement that it has an integrity and a life quite apart from what can be taken from it; to love it is, in other words, to *care* for it” (138). This idea of the goodness of understanding and caring about land is present throughout Berry’s work, including “Manifesto.”

But, in order to care for land, certain requirements are necessary as Berry instructs readers within his essay, “Conservation and Local Economy,” Berry dictates that, “land cannot be properly cared for by people who do not know it intimately, who do not know how to care for it, who are not strongly motivated to care for it, and who cannot afford to care for it” (3). By following these requirements for righteous caregiving, the land will always be protected and loved. Berry explains within, “An Argument for Diversity,” that to truly love the land is to desire most of all the health of the land (115). Within “Manifesto,” this idea of loving the landscape as an existence unto itself and attempting to understand this vital force is communicated within, lines 20-21, and 23. Lines 20-21 read, “Give your approval to all you cannot/ understand.” Line 23, “Ask the questions that have no answers.” Within these lines, the Mad Farmer is insinuating that although, most will not understand the fullness of the land, it does not mean that one should not attempt to learn about the earth intimately. By trying to engage with spirit of the land, one indicates that they truly love and care for the land.

Not only does Berry advocate for proper care of the land through love, but Berry also believes in the governing of the individual by the land, rather than the traditional inverse. Within his essay regarding his devotion to the idea of place, “The Long-Legged House” (1969), Berry explains that being governed by and truly belonging to a place is a

“spiritual ambition, like goodness.” In order to truly belong and be in harmony with the landscape, the land must have dominion over the individual and the individual must be willing to adapt to and for the land (141). This idea that one must be willing to adapt to and for the land connects back to the sacrifice one must make to worship the Creator.

The idea that a human must adapt to the land—not the land adapt to the human—is the foundation of responsible and sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is defined as intentional awareness and cultivation of the land by both the consumer and farmer—the antithesis of factory or industrial farming (the typical method of farming in the Western world).

In “Let the Farm Judge” (2003), Berry discusses what responsible farming should look like: “The goal of intelligent farmers, who desire the long-term success of farming, is to adapt their work to their places” (57). In order to adapt one’s work to the landscape, one must as Pastor Kyle Childress recommends, “pay attention to the particularities of the land itself and listen to others who might have wisdom about what has worked well on this place and what has not.” Childress describes Berry’s practice of farming as working “patiently, humbly, and lovingly” towards understanding the land and its details (76). Seeing and understanding the details is gaining an intimate knowledge of the land. As Berry writes in, “People, Land, And Community,” “it is the properly humbled mind in its proper place that sees truly, because—to give only one reason—it sees details” (70). By adapting farming to the land through an intimate knowledge, not only will the land be healthier but also the farmer will be more successful in his or her efforts to produce and connect.

Not only is sustainable farming important to ecological and economic communities, but the actual practice of farming can teach an individual how to come closer to the divine through one's own act of "creation." Wirzba discusses how participating in the act of sustainable farming and choosing sustainable farming can enrich one's own spirituality. He writes, "As we contribute to the process of fertility and growth—practically speaking by consuming food and energy in just, sustainable manners and by committing to the strengthening of local communities—we enrich creation and so participate, however inadequately, in God's continuing creative work" (162). Wirzba implies that by participating in a small portion of creation, such as the "tending of plants and the husbanding of animals," an individual is helping to build the "Kingdom of God" and access salvation (158).

However, this idea of farmers contributing and building the "Kingdom of God" originated long before the Mad Farmer. The concept of a yeoman, emerging from a rank within the English noble system, is interpreted as a farmer being in alignment with the Creator. Within his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, informed by the concept of the yeoman, Thomas Jefferson explores the relationship between farmer and citizen, and therefore between farmer and God. Within the book entitled, *Farm: A Multimodal Reader*, Jefferson's concept of the model citizen being that of the farmer is explained. The "farmer-citizen" is "someone who is a better citizen because he is a farmer and a better farmer because he is a citizen" (58). According to Jefferson, farming was a noble endeavor because of the farmer's ability to be independent and self-reliant, therefore encompassing the most important traits of an upstanding citizen (Kinkead 58). However, this is only one component of the farmer's importance, as explained by Jefferson. The

farmer also has a direct relationship to the land and therefore, a direct relationship with God. Much like the Creator, the farmer is also tasked with the overseeing of the process of life. Within *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson writes, “Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire which otherwise might escape the face of the earth” (175). Jefferson clearly states that farmers have a divine connection with God because of the connection with the earth. This idea only strengthens the belief that sustainable agriculture can enrich one’s spirituality.

Within many of his writings, including that of “Manifesto,” Berry presents and explains or alludes to why sustainable agriculture can be a vehicle for worship and communion with the divine. The purpose for farming is not only to protect God’s creation and produce life-sustaining nourishment for creatures but its higher purpose is to be what writer and farmer, Fred Bahnson terms in his essay, “The Salvation of the City,” a “small but necessary witness to the Kingdom of God” (98). By engaging oneself properly with farming or gardening, one indicates how God’s creation can benefit humankind. The act of successful farming also indicates the mercy of God— considering the destruction of the creation that humans engage in, thereby insinuating that agriculture is a witness to the inherent goodness of God.

The character of the Mad Farmer is a witness to the power and worship of sustainable agriculture. The Mad Farmer engages in sustainable agriculture through attempting to listen and humbly understand what the land needs. In doing this, he shows

his devotion to God's creation and therefore continues God's creative work by building the "Kingdom of God."

Within "Manifesto," lines 24-33 explicitly demonstrate the devotion to the earth that the Mad Farmer has and promotes within the reader. They read:

Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.

Say that your main crop is the forest

that you did not plant,

that you will not live to harvest.

Say that the leaves are harvested

when they have rotted into the mold.

Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus

that will build under the trees

every thousand years.

These lines indicate that not only is the Mad Farmer selfless in giving back to the natural world (explored in the preceding section), but the Mad Farmer is truly listening to what the land needs and not trying to impose his own will on the land but return it back to the state in which God created it. Sustainable agriculture is not only healthy farming practice, but it involves attempting to return the land back to its original condition: divinely approved. If one participates in this rectification or "practices resurrection," they are participating in their salvation.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusion

Within Wendell Berry's, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," Berry explores many different topics including but not limited to the intersections of nature and spirituality, the importance of community, and the promotion of environmental stewardship and responsible agriculture. "Manifesto" functions as a guide for its readers to increase their own spirituality through the caring for and loving of the land, the land that "Manifesto" urges all to acknowledge.

Although, some readers may interpret this poem as cynical or perhaps even defeatist because of the acknowledgement of the corruption and degradation of the world and the anger expressed by the speaker, Berry and the Mad Farmer still provide hope for the audience through "Manifesto's" call to action. "Manifesto" urges for all to protect the earth by way of worship and to worship the earth by way of protecting it.

Yet, the most significant and dominant idea put forth "Manifesto" arguably is the importance of worship of the Creator through the caring of His creation. All ideas, concepts, questions, and suggestions within "Manifesto" lead back to that one revelation, one must devote themselves to the divine to find salvation. Within the context of Berry's work, the title of Creator not only is a reference to the divine or God, as noted in Section A, but also a promotion for the reader to conceptualize God as a being that directly encourages His own creatures (humans) to further develop and protect creation. However, it should be noted that Berry's definition of what or who the Creator is—is quite narrow. Although this definition of Creator is not shared by many, it does indicate that a fundamental part of the Creator's nature is the bestowal of responsibility upon His creatures.

It seems as if within his religious and spiritual writings, including “Manifesto,” Berry is working toward and communicating an ideal version of Christianity that encompasses his own personal values and beliefs—perhaps even a “Berryian” version of Christianity. At the center, Berry’s version of Christianity instructs followers to worship the Creator by caring for the most precious creation: earth. As Berry writes within the essay, “The Unsettling of America,” “the care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope” (46). “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front” provides a way for all of us to access that unbounded hope with the Mad Farmer to show us the way.

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