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EMBRACING THE SPIRIT OF ALL THINGS: PANPSYCHISM AS A FRAMEWORK FOR COSMIC ESCHATOLOGY

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Abstract

This article challenges the dominant focus on individual eschatology within contemporary Christian thought by proposing panpsychism as a theological and philosophical framework for a more holistic, cosmic eschatology. Drawing from key biblical texts and theological voices, it argues that God's redemptive plan extends beyond human souls to encompass all creation. Panpsychism, which affirms that all things possess some form of spirit or consciousness, resonates deeply with Pacific indigenous worldviews that emphasize relationality, ecological harmony, and sacred kinship with land, sea, and sky. Through the Samoan concept of 'tautua' (sacred service), the article reimagines Christian discipleship not as domination over creation, but as mutual, cosmic participation. In the face of global ecological crisis, this vision of panpsychism and cosmic eschatology offers a transforming reorientation of Christian hope – one that affirms the sacredness of the material world while remaining rooted in biblical faith and the example of Jesus Christ as the ultimate 'tautua'.

Keywords: Quantitative; Research; Academia;

INTRODUCTION

Early in my theological studies, a question posed by a lecturer sparked a deep and lasting curiosity: "What is the destiny of humanity after we leave this earth?" This question challenged the theological framework I had inherited. Raised in a devout Christian household where Scripture was read daily, I was taught by my parents the foundational doctrines of heaven and hell, the afterlife, the Book of Life and many more. These concepts were accepted without question, presented as truth, with no alternative perspectives offered. They were never really examined. However, as I progressed in my studies, I encountered the concept of panpsychism, notably through Lynn White Jr.'s ecotheological critique, which referenced the worldview of St. Francis of Assisi. Panpsychism is the philosophical view that consciousness or spirit is a fundamental feature of all things, not limited to humans alone. White's association of panpsychism with Francis's reverence for all creation opened a new horizon in my



thinking, one that challenged the individualistic lens of salvation and invited a broader, more relational and cosmic view of eschatology.

My personal journey reflects a broader issue in theological discourse: the dominance of individual eschatology. Contemporary theological discourse is marked by an emphasis on individual eschatology, a trend that is also reflected in the preaching and teaching of many churches today. The focus often centers on personal destiny in the afterlife, overshadowing broader eschatological dimensions. In light of this, I propose a necessary shift from individualistic eschatological frameworks towards a more cosmic vision. Panpsychism, as both a philosophical and theological paradigm, offers a valuable foundation for articulating a holistic cosmic eschatology – one that affirms the presence of spirit and consciousness throughout all creation. Such a re-imagination holds particular significance within the Pacific context, where indigenous spiritualities and pressing ecological concerns call for an integrative and relational theological approach.

1. ESCHATOLOGY AND WHY PANPSYCHISM MATTERS

Early Christianity is an eschatological religion from its inception. In Jesus' accounts throughout the Gospel, parables, proclamation of the kingdom, miracles and so forth all show this strong eschatological dimension.¹ Eschatology is the theological study concerned with the ultimate destiny of individuals, humanity, and the cosmos. It encompasses doctrines related to death, judgement, resurrection, the afterlife, and the fulfillment of divine promises regarding the new creation. Within Christian theology, eschatology focuses on the return of Christ and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

There are several eschatological frameworks that can be identified; nonetheless, I shall focus on merely four for the purposes of this article. First, there exists a consistent eschatological perspective (Consistent Eschatology²) that underscores the belief in the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God, which is anticipated to manifest through divine intervention at the culmination of time. Secondly, we encounter the concept of realized eschatology, which emphasizes the idea that the Kingdom of God is already manifested in the ministry of Jesus and within the lives of believers.³ The first two categories of eschatology underscore the notion of time, wherein the ideas typically delineate the historical timeline of events.

Subsequently, the two eschatological concepts concentrate more on the participants involved and their eventual results within the historical context of the world. Thirdly, there exists the concept of individual eschatology, which exclusively examines human destiny, mortality, judgement, the rapture, and other related themes. This form of eschatology explores the implications for 'human' participants in the ultimate outcome. The fourth eschatology is cosmic; which emphasizes the totality of creation and its divine purpose beyond our current existence. This natural progression from individual eschatology invites a broader theological vision, one that moves beyond personal destiny to consider the redemption of all creation as integral to God's ultimate plan. With these categories outlined, we now turn to a vision of eschatology that embraces the full scope of creation.

Cosmic Eschatology

Building upon this foundation, the notion of 'cosmic eschatology' emerges as both a theological necessity and a spiritual reorientation. While individual eschatology centers on personal destiny, cosmic

¹ Andrew Chester, *Eschatology*, in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2007, p. 243-244

² Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*, Archibald Constable & Co., London, 1914, p. 1-25. Schweitzer argues that Jesus expected imminent end of the world, and that this shaped his ministry.

³ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1935, p. 29-52. Dodd argues that Jesus' teachings – especially his parables – point to the Kingdom of God not as a distant or future reality but as a present and active force in the world. He coined the term *Realized Eschatology* to describe this viewpoint, emphasizing that the long-awaited messianic age had already begun in Jesus' earthly ministry. This shifts focus from future to present, within the lives of believers and the community of faith. According to Dodd, the *eschaton* is not something we wait for but something being experienced now through Christ.

eschatology widens the scope to include the entire created order – humans, animals, ecosystems, even the cosmos itself – as participants in God’s redemptive plan. Jurgen Moltmann argues that the redemption brought by Christ is not an escape from the material world but its transformation and fulfillment. He emphasizes that creation is not destined for destruction but renewal, and the Spirit of God is present in all creation, drawing it toward eschatological completion.⁴

The scriptures present a vision of God’s redemptive work that extends beyond individual salvation to encompass the renewal of all creation. The Bible reveals a holistic eschatological hope. From Genesis, where creation is called good and purposeful, to the prophetic visions in Isaiah and the apocalyptic hope of Revelation, Scripture affirms God’s plan for cosmic renewal. This hope envisions not only the mere fate of human souls but the transformation and renewal of the entire cosmos, affirming creation’s intrinsic value and destiny in God’s plan. Theological reflection through church history has sought to interpret and articulate this biblical vision, providing us with a clear understanding of cosmic eschatology today.⁵

In light of panpsychism, which affirms the presence of spirit or consciousness throughout creation, this vision becomes more than abstract theology; it becomes a call to relational awareness. Rather than isolating salvation within the fate of individual souls, cosmic eschatology implies that redemption is deeply ecological, communal, and universal. This shift resonates not only with early Christian thought, but also with the indigenous Pacific worldview, in which land, ocean, and sky are not inert matter but sacred family. Within this frame, panpsychism serves as a bridge between Christian eschatology and indigenous cosmology.

Why Panpsychism Matters

As mentioned, panpsychism matters because it offers a metaphysical and theological framework that counters the deep-rooted dualisms in much of Western Christianity – spirit over matter, human over non-human, heaven over earth. By affirming that all things possess some form of consciousness, panpsychism dissolves the sharp boundary between human and non-human creation. This has eschatological implications. It invites a salvation not as a spiritual evacuation but as a cosmic transformation.⁶ In this view, the destiny of the world is not separation or escape, but renewal – where mountains, rivers, stars, and creatures all participate in God’s final restoration. Furthermore, it challenges theologies and ideologies that value only the soul, instead affirming the sacredness of material reality and its role in God’s purposes.

In the Pacific context, panpsychism resonates powerfully with indigenous understandings of land, sea, and sky as living realities – not merely resources, but also kin. The Pacific worldview, like panpsychism, perceives spirit as immanent within creation, not confined to human experience. For example, Epeli Ha’uofa articulates, the ocean, land, and sky are not merely physical resources but living relatives with whom people share deep, reciprocal relationships.⁷ This relational understanding views the environment as a community of beings interconnected through spirit and life force, rather than as inert matter to be exploited. Similarly, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi emphasizes that the Samoan understanding of *āiga* extends beyond human kin to encompass land, sea, and sky as living relatives.⁸ Though not using the term panpsychism, Tui Atua’s reflections articulate a worldview that resonates deeply with idea of spirit or consciousness present throughout creation. This expansion reflects a holistic

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, SCM Press, London, 1985, p. 25-27, 97-99

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1996, p. 15-30. Moltmann emphasizes that God’s eschatological promise is not about escaping the world but about its transformation and renewal, where creation participates actively in God’s redemptive plan.

⁶ Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 167-170. Clayton argues that panpsychism offers a viable metaphysical model for rethinking the place of consciousness in the cosmos. He connects this view with theological implications, including shift from escapist eschatologies to models of redemption that involved the transformation of the material world rather than its abandonment.

⁷ Epeli Ha’uofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*, University of Hawai’ii Press, Honolulu, 2008, p. 27-40.

⁸ Tui Atua Tupu Tamasese Efi, *Su’esu’e Manogi” In Search of Fragrance*, National University of Samoa, 2008, p. 45-50.

ontology where all creation participates in a shared spiritual identity. These resonate well with panpsychism's affirmation that consciousness or spirit permeates all aspects of the natural world, inviting a theology that honors the sacredness of the environment and challenges anthropocentric assumptions.

Establishing the significance of panpsychism as a philosophical and theological foundation for a holistic and relational cosmic eschatology essentially grounds this vision firmly within the biblical narrative and Christian theological tradition. While panpsychism offers a framework to reimagine the scope of salvation and creation's destiny, the authority of Scripture and historic Christian doctrine remain central to articulating cosmic eschatology. The following section will explore key biblical texts and theological insights that reveal God's redemptive purpose not only for humanity but for the entire cosmos – demonstrating that the hope for cosmic renewal is rooted in the Christian faith from its earliest origins. This will provide both the foundation and the contours of a robust cosmic eschatology that aligns with the relational vision inspired by panpsychism.

While some critics argue that panpsychism risks blurring the clear distinction between Creator and creation or diminishes human uniqueness, I contend that embracing a cosmic perspective enriches rather than undermines biblical theology, reaffirming God's sovereignty while expanding the scope of redemption.

2. THE BIBLICAL/ THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF COSMIC ESCHATOLOGY

The scope of God's redemptive act is revealed in Scripture and extends far beyond the salvation of individual souls to include the renewal and restoration of the entire cosmos. From the creation stories in Genesis, to the eschatological visions by the prophets and apostles, the Bible witnesses creation's intrinsic value and its destined renewal.

Covenant with the Cosmos

The Noahic covenant is a great example in relation to this study's emphasis on cosmic eschatology and the holistic scope of God's redemptive plan. As Aaron Chalmers observes, the covenant established in Genesis 9 broadens the typical understanding of redemption to include all of creation, not just humanity – a common but limited interpretation.⁹ This covenant reveals three distinct dimensions: God's promise to humanity through Noah and his descendants, God's commitment to every living creature, and God's covenant with earth itself. Though Noah and his family are named as covenant recipients, the biblical narrative makes clear they all represent humanity as the sole survivors of the flood. Therefore, God's covenant with Noah is effectively a covenant with all human beings, extending God's life-sustaining promises beyond the elect nation of Israel.¹⁰

Significantly, God also establishes covenantal relationships with the entire animal kingdom (Gen 9:9-11) and the earth itself (Gen 9:13). This inclusivity challenges theological views that prioritize human beings as the sole focus of God's concern and highlights a covenant that encompasses the full created order. Prophetic texts, such as Hosea 2:18, further anticipate a future peace that includes wild animals and nature, pointing toward the eschatological renewal of all life.

Romans 8:18-23

This text is often regarded as a pivotal biblical passage for understanding cosmic eschatology. Here, Paul speaks not only of the suffering and future glory of believers but also depicts creation itself as groaning and awaiting redemption. This imagery portrays the natural world as an active participant in God's redemptive plan linking to human salvation yet possessing its own destiny within the scope of renewal.

N. T. Wright highlights that Paul's depiction of creation 'groaning' in Romans 8:19-22 should be understood not as a passive suffering but as eager anticipation for the renewal of all things – a cosmic hope intimately tied to Christ's resurrection. He interprets the 'bondage to decay' described by Paul as the result of human brokenness and sin, which have disrupted not just human life but the entire created

⁹ Aaron Chalmers, "The Importance of the Noahic Covenant to Biblical Theology," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 60/2 (2009), p. 212-213. See also Jeong Koo Jeon, "The Noahic Covenants and the Kingdom of God," in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24 (2013), p. 1279-1309. See also Pei Tsai, "The Importance of the Noahic Covenant and its Function as the Basis of Creation Care," *Reformed Theological Seminary* (2015), p. 2-5

¹⁰ A. Chalmers, "The Importance of the Noahic Covenant," p.212-213.

order.¹¹ Beyond textual exegesis, Wright connects this theme to Christian life today. He proposes that believers, as ‘firstfruits’ of the Spirit, share in this groaning and are thus called to embody the renewal of creation.¹²

Douglas J. Moo underscored Paul’s portrayal of creation’s present suffering as cosmic ‘bondage to decay’, which echoes the effects of humanity’s fall. Drawing on both Jewish apocalyptic thought and early church exegesis, Moo argues that Paul’s language reveals a deep-seated theological vision: creation is not doomed to oblivion, but awaiting liberation in tandem with the revealing of God’s children. This cosmic redemption is rooted in God’s sovereign promise and opens the gospel to a broader cosmic dimension, challenging reductionist views of salvation and affirming the continuity of God’s purposes between humanity and nature.¹³

3. COSMIC DISCIPLESHIP: LEARNING TO SERVE WITH CREATION

If the cosmos is not destined for destruction but for transformation, and if all creation bears some form of spirit or consciousness, then Christian discipleship must be redefined in more-than-human terms. In this vision, discipleship is not just about personal piety or moral behavior, but about participating in the shared life and service of a sacred, interconnected world.

Ilia Delio presents a cosmic Christology where evolution and divine love converge, suggesting that discipleship involves aligning with the whole evolutionary process of the cosmos. She argues that a new form of Christian life is one of deep communion and service with all creation as the body of Christ.¹⁴ This service is rooted in deep communion with all creation, affirming a sacred interconnectedness and shared life between humans and the world.¹⁵ Similarly, Norman Wirzba redefines human vocation as “creaturely membership” within God’s creation, where discipleship is understood as service to the flourishing of all life.¹⁶ For Wirzba, discipleship entails ‘participating in the healing and renewal of creation’, reflecting eschatological hope for a restored and renewed cosmos.¹⁷

Building on this understanding, service emerges not only as human-centered duty but as a dynamic participation in the relational and purposeful life of the cosmos. In a panpsychist framework, every element of creation contributes uniquely to the flourishing of the whole. Thus service becomes a reciprocal and mutual activity – humans serve creation as much as creation serves humanity – reflecting a cosmic interdependence. For example, I serve this chair, and this chair serves me. This is a reminder that even inanimate things play their part in the great cosmic world of service and mutual care.¹⁸

Tautua as Discipleship

From a Samoan perspective, *tautua*, the sacred act of service, is central to life and community. It is not only about what we do for others but about recognizing our role within a web of relationships that includes family, land, and spirit. Just as *tautua* binds the *aiga* together through mutual care and responsibility, so too does cosmic discipleship call us to serve and be served by all creation.

Etymologically, the word *tautua* is derived from the combination of two distinct Samoan words: *tau* – which can mean cost, fight, or strive; and *tua* – which can mean from the back, behind, or beyond.

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1 – Chapters 1-8*, 2nd ed., SPCK, London, 2004, p. 224-225

¹² N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1*, p. 226-227

¹³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2nd ed., 2018, p.515-520

¹⁴ Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2013, p. 135-140.

¹⁵ Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness*, p. 138

¹⁶ Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity’s Place in a Wounded World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021, p.172-177

¹⁷ Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, p.174

¹⁸ Joanna Leidenhag, *Minding Creation: Theological Panpsychism and the Doctrine of Creation*, T&T Clark (T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology), London, 2021, p. 155-158. Leidenhag argues that poetic biblical texts such as Psalm 98:7-9, Isaiah 55:12, and Romans 8:19-22 reflect panpsychist intuition. She proposes that Scripture portrays creation as *subjective* and *participatory* in God’s redemptive purposes.

Put together, the word *tautua* means service from the back. According to Vaitusi Nofoaiga, “*Tautua* is not about status. Rather it is a family and community based social and cultural role.”¹⁹ This understanding of *tautua* resonates deeply with the vision of cosmic discipleship as proposed, where service is not about power or dominance or even status, but about humble participation in the life of a larger whole. Just as *tautua* emphasizes relational responsibility within the family and community, cosmic service invites us to sacred, reciprocal relationship with all creation. True discipleship serves with support, sustaining, and honoring the interconnected web of life in God’s cosmos.

Ultimately, Jesus himself embodied the deepest meaning of *tautua*. He did not come to be served, but to serve (*tautua*) and to give his life for others (Mark 10:45). His ministry was one of self-giving love, humility, and radical hospitality – not from a place of dominance, but from behind, lifting others up. In the cosmic sense, Christ serves as the center who draws all creation into communion with God. He washed feet, fed the hungry, calmed storms, and embraced the outcast. These were not just acts of compassion, but as acts of restoring the broken harmony between creation and Creator. Jesus is a *tautua*. Not only is it social and familial, but cosmic.

4. COSMIC ETHIC: PANPSYCHISM, ECOLOGICAL AGENCY, AND ONTOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The convergence of panpsychism and cosmic eschatology compels a re-evaluation and ontological assumptions that supports modern ecological ethics. In contrast to utilitarian or dominion-based perspectives, a panpsychist ontology affirms that all entities, from the human to the non-human, from oceans to atoms, possess intrinsic value by virtue of their spirited or conscious participation in being. This has radical implications for how theological anthropology is redefined, and how moral agency is distributed across the world.²⁰

Rather than framing ecological care as stewardship from above, a position still emphasized in hierarchical metaphysics – panpsychism invites us into relational participation, a more horizontal relationship. In this view, creation is an active subject in the moral economy of the cosmos. The *actor-network theory*²¹ of Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett’s notion of *vibrant matter*²² echo similar philosophical impulses, where agency is decentered and spread across networks of inter-being. Panpsychism provides the metaphysical basis for such distributed agency while grounding it in theological purpose: the eschatological transformation of all things in Christ.

Therefore, ethical responsibility becomes ontological rather than just moral. We are called not only to care for nature but to live as co-creators within a spirited cosmos, each action bearing weight in the unfolding eschaton. The relational universe of panpsychism transforms ecological ethics into a sacred vocation, a calling rooted in communion and complementarity.²³

As mentioned, this cosmic ethic is particularly urgent in the current ecological crisis, especially within the Pacific context and other areas of the world. Rising seas, ecological degradation, and extractive industries threaten not only biodiversity but ontological integrity. Here, theological and philosophical reflection becomes resistance to anthropocentrism, colonial models, and to eschatologies of escape. We must reclaim land as *aiga* (kin), and the ocean as ancestral presence. In our Pacific communities, enacting a lived cosmic ethic, one that harmonizes panpsychism, indigenous cosmology, and Christian eschatology is vital.

¹⁹ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, SBL Press, Atlanta, 2017, p.33

²⁰ Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness*, p. 85-89. Delio presents a theological vision of relational ontology where all of creation participates in divine life.

²¹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1993, p.1-10. Latour’s *actor-network theory* proposes that agency is not limited to humans but is distributed across networks of humans and nonhumans.

²² Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010, p. 112-114. Bennett explores distributed moral agency and the vitality of nonhuman matter.

²³ Upolu Luma Vaai, *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 2017, p. 53. Vaai develops a relational and decolonial theology rooted in Pacific worldviews. He directly challenges anthropocentrism, calling for theology to be ecological and cosmic in nature.

Hence, panpsychism not only enriches eschatological vision but also grounds an ethic of sacred interdependence, where humanity is redefined not by dominion but by horizontal relational embeddedness. In this framework, the destiny of the human is inseparable from the destiny of the cosmos; salvation is ecological, and ethics is eschatological.

CONCLUSION

I believe that, in light of the growing urgency of ecological collapse and theological reductionism, reimagining eschatology through the lens of panpsychism is an approach that affirms the spirit-filled nature of all creation and insists on a more relational, cosmic vision of salvation. Drawing from biblical, theological, and indigenous Pacific resources, I have argued that eschatology must move beyond the narrow confines of individual destiny and embrace the sacred destiny of the entire cosmos. The integration of panpsychism with Christian theology not only challenges dualistic notions but also affirms the call to cosmic discipleship and ecological responsibility. Therefore, we reclaim an eschatological vision that is communal, planetary, where *tautua* (service) extends beyond human communities to include our *aiga* or family in land, sea, sky, and all objects. Such a vision is not only faithful to Scripture but urgently needed in our time.

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