

Religion, Nature and Ecology

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From 1996 to 1998 the *Center for the Study of World Religions* at the Universities of Harvard and Bucknell, organized a series of conferences on the theme «religion and ecology». During this period, more than 600 researchers religious leaders and environmental activists participated in the program. The intention was to discover intellectual and symbolic resources in each of the religious traditions regarding their views on nature, ritual practice and ethics. The conferences were a result of the increasing interest during the past three decades in the relationship between religious faith and environmental issues. Those who organized the conferences were of the opinion that even Religious Studies as an academic program, played an important role, especially with regard to clarifying the way various cultures perceive nature, and to spell out what kind of attitudes people have towards nature, and ways in which humans choose to relate to nature. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who organized these conferences, said:

Clearly religions need to be involved with the development of a more comprehensive worldview and ethics to assist in reversing this trend. Whether from an anthropocentric or a biocentric perspective, more adequate environmental values need to be formulated and linked to areas of public policy. Scholars of religion can be key players in this articulation process. Moreover, there are calls from other concerned parties to participate in a broader alliance to halt the loss of species, top soil, and natural resources. It is our hope to expand this alliance of scholars and activists by creating common ground for dialogue and creative partnership in envisioning and implementing long range solutions to some of our most pressing environmental problems. This is critical because the attitudes and values that shape people's concepts of nature come primarily from religious worldviews and ethical practices. The moral imperative and value systems of religions are indispensable in mobilizing the sensibilities of people toward preserving the environment for future generations.¹

It is claimed that attitudes and values, which shape people's perception of nature, to a large extent derive from the religious traditions and their views on ethical action. Thomas Berry, a Christian environmentalist philosopher, contends that we have become "autistic" in our dealing with the world of nature, and that we have lost our ability to appreciate nature because we have become locked into eco-centric perspectives based on short-term needs. His opinion is that we need *a new cosmology*, a new set of cultural codes and a motivational "energy" to escape the deadlock in which we find ourselves.² Such an escape assumes that the religious value systems and their moral ideals are important sources for mobilizing people to preserve and protect the eco-system for future generations. The ecological crisis is, in other words, not only a political, social and economic crisis, but also a religious and moral crisis. This is the main reason why the religious traditions need to be drawn into the work with regard to the ecological challenges and problems facing humankind today.

We are facing a formidable challenge when attempting to research the attitude of the religious traditions with regard to nature and environmental ethics. Especially it is important to find out why the religions have hesitated to allow themselves to be included in environmental work. Have such ideas as a "personal salvation" contributed to eclipse other perspectives of a broader nature? Has the relation between the divine and the human been considered so basic, that other relations have been disregarded? Is the human-focused (*anthropocentric*) ethics responsible for having nature's need been considered as irrelevant when competing with human interests? The questions

¹ Internet document: <http://www.crl.org/commonground.html>

² Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

are many, and they have no easy answers. In the following we shall have to limit ourselves to a short description of the most important conceptions and ideas as found in the major religious traditions with regard to their views on nature. Then we shall focus upon the Christian tradition, and give an interpretation of some of the problems and challenges facing Christianity in its view on nature and the environment. This discussion will be done from an “inside” perspective, i.e., utilizing a *theological* form of discussion, in the attempt to come to terms with some of the aspects touching upon Christianity’s perception of nature.

1. Ecology and Religious Perception of Nature

The Western theistic traditions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to a large degree represent a unified view of nature and on the relationship between humans and the natural world. This relationship is to a large extent spelled out by means of an *anthropocentric morality* because nature has usually been considered something secondary, at least compared with God. In all the three religious traditions, God’s transcendence has been heavily emphasized. God is *above* nature and nature has been *given* to humankind for them to care for. There are nevertheless important perspectives in these religious traditions, which emphasize a close relationship between humans and nature, a relationship in which the *responsibility* of humankind is extremely important.

In **Islam** it is pointed out that human beings are *stewards* on behalf of God. In their affirmation of the unity of Allah, Muslims will see this unity expressed through the unity of humankind, and in the unity between humans and nature. The holy book of Islam, the Quran, reminds people of their responsibility as stewards (*khalifa Allah*). To be a steward means that humans not only have special privileges, but also obligations toward the created world. Humans shall rule the world on behalf of God in such a way that we have to answer for the way we deal with it to Allah himself on the day of the final judgment. All the *Quran*’s chapters (except one) begin with the words, “Allah is merciful and compassionate”. These words emphasize how humans shall behave in their relationship with other persons as well as other creatures. According to the *Hadith* tradition, the one who is good towards the creatures of God is good towards oneself, and Muhammad himself is supposed to have taught that good actions directed towards animals, are just as valuable as good actions towards people, while evil actions towards animals are equal to evil acts towards people.

The stewardship idea is prominent both in Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and may be said to constitute a common ground for an ecological theology. There are, however, nuances in the three traditions’ theologies with regard to a further development of how to understand nature and the idea of stewardship. In **Judaism**, the holy scriptures emphasize a theology of the *covenant* as an expression of the obligation Jews have in their management of nature and the natural resources. The story of creation tells about Adam, that it was his duty “to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15), and in the Mosaic Laws for the human society, also the obligations towards animals are spelled out. The Book of Psalms contain descriptions of nature which presuppose a close relationship between people and the world of nature (cf. Ps 104).

Christianity and the New Testament emphasize an interpretation of Christ’s coming to the world (*incarnation*), which makes possible a view of the created world as *sacred*. The created world thus demands to be treated with the utmost respect. St. Paul speaks in his letter to the Romans (8:19-21) about how “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Thus there is hope also for creation: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now,” and so the whole of creation shall be renewed and liberated from its subjection to perishableness and receive a

share in the same freedom as all children of God will have in the resurrection. Until these things happen, all of creation will groan in travail, and suffer as if in labor.

In **Hinduism** is put on performing one's duties toward the world while at the same time one strives for the final liberation from this world and its sufferings. Through spiritual discipline and mediation, one turns away from the world (*prakṛti*) to the absolute reality (*puruṣa*). But there are also several traditions within Hinduism, which precisely in this transitory world see a revelation of the Absolute. Natural objects such as rivers, mountains and forests may serve as the media of such revelation, thus making them *sacred*. Also the concept of *lila*, the creative actions of the gods, Hindus might see a creative manifestation of the sacred in this world.

The same tension between a spiritual retreat from the world and a confirmation of this-worldliness may also be seen in **Buddhism**. Especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism special emphasis is put on the interrelatedness between all things. The so-called *Hua-yen* Buddhism of China likens the world with a perfectly made net in which all things exist in a state of mutual relatedness. In Japanese Buddhism, we find a long and rich tradition in which the Buddha nature (*tathagatagarbha*) of all things are exhibited in beautiful gardens and symbolic actions. In later years many Buddhists have sought ways of expressing their Buddhist identity in social and ecological activities meant to preserve and protect the natural habitat of Asia.

The East Asian traditions such as **Confucianism**, **Taoism** and **Shinto**, have often been considered life affirming religious traditions. Their view of the continuity between the divine and the natural world might be described as an *anthropocosmic* view of reality.³ There is no emphasis on the radical otherness of the Divine (transcendence) as in the theistic traditions. Rather we find a cosmology, which emphasizes the idea of a continuing creation in nature by virtue of nature's own order. This cosmology is founded on a philosophy about what the Chinese call *ch'i* – a force penetrating all things in the universe, working both at the material and spiritual levels. To live in harmony with nature and in a human society is achieved by understanding the movement of *Tao*, and this understanding is then coupled with the formation and education of the individual person. It should be noted, however, that this life affirming cosmology has not been able to prevent environmental destructions such as e.g., deforestation, in parts of Eastern Asia, neither in previous times nor in today's world.

Not even the native peoples' religious traditions – in spite of their presumed "ecological" cosmology, have been able to prevent destructions of the ecosystem on which we depend. Often large areas of vegetation has been burnt in order to cultivate the earth, and when these areas have been sufficiently degraded, people have simply moved to other areas and continued the same process there. Nonetheless, we often find that native people actually have a well-developed understanding of nature founded on their cosmology, as well as a vision for taking care of the environment. Such an understanding of nature is often expressed in e.g., hunting- and gatherer cultures' traditions in terms of mutual obligations between the local bioregion and its human inhabitants. The religious ideas at the heart of native peoples' conceptions of life include respect for the sources of food, clothing and dwelling places, because these things are connected with spiritual forces who express themselves in relation to the created world.

The religious traditions mentioned above represent both problems and possibilities with regard to the development of a cosmology, morality and motivational factors in the context of environmental work. Most often, the problems arise from the fact that ethical reflection often is connected with an anthropocentric perception of life, and the fact that our concrete obligations to the natural world are only rarely made explicit. This is in particular true with regard to the theistic traditions, which have emphasized the divine *transcendence* more than the other religious traditions. In the following we shall therefore take a closer look at the Christian religion. The

³ Cf. Tu Wei-ming in *Commonality and Centrality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

point of view to be pursued will be based on the above-mentioned contrast: *transcendence versus immanence*.

2. Longing for eternity

a. *The Pilgrim's journey as an escape from the world*

When John Bunyan (1628-1688) wrote his book, *A Pilgrim's Progress*, his intention was to show how worldly temptations represent obstacles for people who long for eternal life. To Bunyan, true Christianity consists in the liberation of the soul from earthly life in order to reach the ultimate goal, heaven and eternity. The "earthly" is an expression of the reality of evil, and the world is a place where the enemy of the soul is at work. As long as we are in this world, we are constantly exposed to all kinds of dangers that seek to lure people away from the straight path. There is only one kind of weapon powerful enough to counter the attack of evil: God's Word. With the word of God one can overcome the temptations, counter the attacks by the soul enemy, and reach ultimate liberation in heaven.

To Bunyan and to many people in the pietistic-puritan tradition after him, religious salvation consists in the *escape* from the world and its conditions of existence. Christian living implies a flight away from the world, away from all temptations and evil, which seek to destroy the soul's longing for eternal life. Salvation is to be liberated from sin and to realize that the ultimate goal is not found on the earthly realm, but in heaven. The Christian individual, therefore, should not become too much concerned about earthly matters, but seek a spiritual relationship to the eternal in the heavenly realm.

The pietistic-puritan tradition has been extremely important in the formation of Western religious culture. In the tradition of the Finno-Scandinavian north, this tradition is eminently represented by the so-called Laestadian Christianity, a revival movement with roots among the Sámi people in the 19th century, and transferred by them to Finnish, Swedish and the Norwegian peoples. The idea of the Pilgrim, who travels from the earthly realm toward heaven, is often found in the poetry and songs arising from this movement. One person, Ole Martin Brenngam who lived on the northern coast of the Finnmark region, wrote such words (*my translation*):

The world is a desert land
for the tired wanderer.
There is no rest to be found,
until he reaches the heavenly shores.

We live here in sadness
the soul sighs in longing,
Longing to the shores of freedom
in the beautiful land of Canaan.

Yes, it seems to me that I see
the world is darkening more and more
Therefore it is no wonder
that the people of God finds no comfort here.

Now it should be pointed out that such experiences of the negative aspects of life not *only* are based on a desire to escape life in general. Such poems can also be read as expressions of a very common experience that life actually was hard and strenuous. Life in a harsh climate with much poverty has never been easy, and for many peoples such words characterizing life on earth as living in "a valley of tears", helped them to put words to their deepest feelings and frustrations. The Pilgrim perspective on life was a powerful one, and it also served as a way to understand how they should think, live and act – and that there *was* a hope to cling to, a hope that could be

obtained faith, trust, sincerity and compassion. But with regard to a view of *nature*, this perspective offered little help. It was simply not seen as relevant to the Pilgrim's journey; it belonged to the worldly realm and could therefore be transferred to those who chose to cling to the world under the false presumption that the world is all that they have.

Behind this attitude is the idea that the created world is an evil place, and that it is possible to separate the spiritual from the worldly as the only really true and real. The material world is then not much more than an evil illusion, something that should not concern the Christian. Such ideas are, however, actually not of Christian origin. They penetrated into Christian thought through the early medieval influence, and put a peculiar stamp on Christian theology. If that is the case, then one might also argue that such thought is not necessary for a Christian perception of life, and that it is necessary to counter its influence because it contradicts a theological interpretation of the creation as well as the incarnation. The Pilgrim idea represents a problem because it goes against a Christian faith in the Creator and separates creation from salvation in a way, which isolates the human being from the world God has made; to which humans actually belong by virtue of being a creature of nature.

b. *Religion as an Individual Affair*

The special focus on the salvation of the human individual is not unique to Christianity; one can also find this tendency even in Buddhism. To be born as a human person is the key to salvation; until this "lucky birth" has been obtained, ultimate salvation in the sense of obtaining nirvana, is not possible. In the Buddhist tradition, becoming religious is conceived as a discovery of the true relationship towards one's innermost being. It is not that the relevance of external relations is denied. The Buddhist *samgha* (the monastary fellowship) can give advice as to how to rule a country, and there is no lack of examples of Buddhist monks initiating social projects for the benefit of people or nature.

In a Christian context, one might argue that the religious engagement in a pietistic and/or puritan context have direct consequences for the way one behaves in society. The Sociologist Max Weber attempted to show how pietist ideals promote a social activism, which also has social implications. The problem, however, is that this form of social activism has an *external* relation to a person's religious identity. They are often not linked to how people perceive salvation, but usually seen as mere *consequences* of salvation. They are good deeds, which testify to one's religious identity, but they are not a part of the *reality* of salvation as such.

Religion is thus usually conceived as a *personal* matter, and this is of course an important and indispensable part of the religious point of view. A onesided focus on the personal aspect, however, has a tendency to isolate the religious individual from the context in which it lives. In real life, it becomes a matter for the individual itself to decide how and to what extent one ought to be engaged in so-called secular issues. Religious life may undoubtedly motivate to social activism in e.g., environmental issues. The problem is *how* such activism is related to the religious identity as such. The question thus arises whether religion could have dimensions other than the mere person-oriented, and whether the religious understanding of salvation might have characteristics other than the one which regards life as an escape from earthly life towards the eternal life in an otherworldly realm, whether in "heaven" or "nirvana".

c. *Inner / Outer Aspects of Religious Identity*

In line with the pietist way of thinking, modern society has tended to see religion as a matter for the individual and their personal conviction. As a consequence of modern theories about secularization, the social dimension of religion has, at least in the Western world, been rendered

invisible by sociologists as well as anthropologists. The sociologist Peter Berger, however, has in recent years made public his views that such interpretations of secularizations have failed, and he now says that sociologists need to postpone the prediction that the world is becoming more and more secularized. The tendency to see religious identity as primarily a matter of *personal* identity is in the process of being replaced with the view that religious identity is primarily a *social* issue. Life in the world is also of primary importance for religious people, not only in terms of an escape from the world, but as a turning *towards* the world, i.e., that life in the world in itself is a religious issue. The “inner” and “outer” aspects are connected with the need to keep the sacred and the profane *together*, and conceive them as two opposite areas. To live as a religious person has to do with seeing life as *one*: to live as a Christian is to live truly spiritually in the secular realm! Religious liberation is not only salvation for the soul *from* the world, but to a life *in* the world. Salvation concerns the whole human person in all its relationships, including its relation to the natural world. The problem of “inner” and “outer” with regard to the question of religious identity is therefore actually a problem concerning human living within the world of nature, and therefore the interpretation of life that studies human life as belonging to the realm of creation with intrinsic meaning and value also in a religious sense.

3. Longing for the Release of Creation

a. *Transitoriness as a Religious Problem*

In his letter to the Romans, we have already mentioned that he awaits the release of creation itself from its bondage to decay. “Decay”, or the transitoriness of creation, is used to characterize the conditions of existence under the condition of sin, but at the same time it is pointed out that this condition is not meant to last forever. The Christian hope is that the created world, along with human persons, will be liberated from the conditions of decay in order to live in freedom. To share in the Spirit, is for St. Paul the anticipation of the ultimate freedom, life and peace. The believer has already here and now tasted “the first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23), and so even the natural world is expected to receive a similar “foretaste” of the imminent liberation and future glory.

In the Hebrew Scriptures we find various images reflecting the future state of liberation which also affect the world of nature:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; Let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes.
He will judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth (Slm 96: 11-13).

The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice;
Clouds and thick darkness are round about him;
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Slm 97:1-2).

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!
Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together
before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth (Slm 98:7-9a).

The future time of salvation in a Christian interpretation of life, thus includes both nature and people. Nature is something *more* than mere physical *surroundings* for human life on earth; it is also our *origin* and as such included in the history of salvation through the hope for a final resurrection and liberation from an existence characterized by the conditions of sin.

Transitoriness has in the Christian tradition usually been regarded as a problem for the individual to cope with, a problem which will receive its final solution in the resurrection and in Eternity. But if nature itself has a share in the expectation of the ultimate events, the hope of liberation

cannot only be connected with the hope for an individual resurrection. The liberation of nature will then be something that occurs within the framework of *history*, thus becoming a matter of the “this-worldly”. The same also applies to the hope for the *human* resurrection. The hope for resurrection is therefore insolubly linked with the immanent perspective (the this-worldly), as the expectation of *salvation as liberation*.

Christianity is at heart a *historical* religion, and “liberation” has in the Christian tradition been linked with historical events of a paradigmatic nature. It was the Israelites’ liberation from their imprisonment in Egypt, which constituted the pattern (paradigm) for their understanding of salvation. Salvation means to be liberated from unjust oppression. Salvation is to be able to live in freedom and peace; it is the *historical* process, which leads towards life and peace. Thus transitoriness does not mean freedom from the conditions of worldly conditioning, but to be able to live “free from the Law of syn and death” (cf. Rom 8:2). The issue of salvation does not so much deal with the hope for an eternal heavenly life, as it deals with the hope for living in freedom, and this very hope is also shared by other earthly creatures, whether they are trees, animals, mountains or rivers – or even ecosystems! The Christian understanding of salvation thus has an *ecological* perspective at its core: it concerns the created world in all its multitude of creatures, and it aims at a mode of living in which sin no longer is decisive for the conditions of existence. Salvation is freedom for creation to live according to God’s will for creation.

b. *Salvation as Liberation from Oppression*

The French priest and scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, once wrote a book called *Le Milieu Divin* and dedicated it to “those who love the world”.⁴ All his life he fought against the Pilgrim idea as applied to the understanding of salvation, because he found it plain wrong to single out the world as the domain of evil and promote eternity as the solution to the devastations of sin. His theology was built on the foundation that if it really is the case that God loved the *world* so much that he gave his only son (John 3:16), then humans also cannot do anything but *love the world*. To be a Christian, according to Teilhard, is to have one’s religious identity linked to the hope for liberation of the world from the conditions of sin, not to the hope of achieving a liberation from existing in the world. The Christian hope for resurrection is not meant as an escape from the world, but as a radical turning *to* the world, for the sake of the world!

Also in Buddhism, we find a similar “return” to the world after one has found one’s True Self. “Awakening” or Enlightenment is to be liberated from the conditions of existence in *samsara*. In Mahâyâna Buddhism the ideal is not the *arhant*, the solitary monk who has withdrawn from the world, but the *bodhisattva* who willingly has renounced nirvana in order to return to *samsara* to save all other living beings. A bodhisattva is someone who puts the need of salvation for others above one’s own liberation from the wheel of existence.

In the Christian tradition one can find the idea of a return to living in the world in the story of Jesus. In his final sermon to his disciples, Jesus says that it will benefit them that he now is about to leave them, because if he does not depart, the Counselor will not come to them (John 16:7). The sending of the Holy Spirit to the world implies that God’s presence *in* the world will not cease when Jesus leaves them – actually, it will be an even more penetrating presence because the Spirit will be present *everywhere* whereas Jesus as a human person can only be in one place at a time. The Spirit, on the other hand, is not restricted to time and space, and it is the Spirit who will “help” the disciples to live as Christians, wherever they are and at all times. The Spirit will help them to live as whole persons, filled with a joy which nobody can take away (John 16:22).

Salvation understood as liberation of the whole person, implies that the human being cannot be

⁴ *Le Milieu Divin*. (Editions du Seuil, 1957. Engelsk oversettelse London: William Collins & Sons, 1957).

seen as merely a soul needing release from the conditions of existence. That the *whole person* is to be saved, implies that the person is re-connected to God in a new relation and to one's own life-world. Everything is in a sense as before, but everything is nevertheless radically different. The "new creation" is a re-constitution of the relations in which a person at any time finds oneself, and which includes all aspects of human living: the relationship towards one own self, to other people, to society, and to nature. The person is "released" from such destructive relations that keep one imprisoned in unjust and oppressive structures. Thus the person is set free to enter into relations that create and communicate freedom, peace and joy both to oneself and others. In this sense, one could claim that "salvation" is primarily a relational concept, not an ontological one, i.e., a concept which reflects the way reality is meant to be according to the Divine will.

c. *Liberation as Realization of Life Quality*

To the extent that salvation is understood from its immanent perspective, i.e., something that concerns *this life*, one might also say that salvation includes the idea that the religious ideal consists in the realization of life quality for all living species, including humans. As a contrast to salvation interpreted as life *quality*, one could see how the pilgrim idea understands salvation in a quantitative sense: salvation is conceived as eternal life, a life without the limitations of time and space in the presence of God. If we, however, understand salvation as something that concerns life as such, then it implies a negation of such a dualistic way of thinking. Salvation is not "otherness" in an ontological sense, but "otherness" in a relational sense, and theologically, this otherness has its basis in the idea that to be in the presence of God is not reserved for a heavenly mode of existence in eternity, distinct from the conditions of existence in this world. It is rather a "heavenly mode of existence" *within* the conditions of this world and its natural limitations because God has already promised his presence by assuring us of the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The letters of St. Paul show a consistent emphasis on the presence of the Spirit among the Christians, especially in the Christians' coming together for worship as in the Liturgy of the Church. The presence of the Spirit can assume many forms (cf. 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12), but the main idea is that the presence of the Spirit gives humans the possibility of structuring their living in a different way than before, and to create new relations characterized by different norms than in the "world": there is no ultimate distinctions between ethnic identity, between males and females, between social status, etc. There is therefore a *qualitative difference* between the old and new relations as a consequence of faith in Christ. Equality and justice shall replace inequalities and unjust structures – even though the old relations continue to be serious temptations as they appeal to our desires to assert ourselves according to the old norms.

Traditionally one has tended to focus on the meaning of the presence of the Spirit within the framework of the Church, thus rendering the relevance of the presence of the Spirit to matters concerning the Christians only. But such a limitations cannot be maintained in our perspective. The new qualitative relations also has relevance for people's social living, and in their relations towards nature. Church history display many examples of this perspective's concrete applications – e.g., the attempts of the Jerusalem Church to organize a Christian community without personal property (Acts 2:42ff), and Francis of Assisi's respect for all living creatures as brothers and sisters. Such attempts have not always been successful ones, but they nevertheless testify to the fact that people in different times and circumstances have actually attempted to apply the view that salvation is something that not only concern the single individual soul, but actually concern society at large as well as the whole realm of nature.

4. Faith in Creation and the Interpretation of Nature

a. *People and Nature: Common Origins and Common Fate*

People always find themselves living within the context of nature because we *are* nature. We have developed as a species through thousands and hundreds of thousands of years alongside the natural world, and so we have also shared their conditions of existence and learned that we are dependent on this natural community of living beings. During the last few hundred years, however, humans have tended to distance themselves more and more from their own life world. Through the development of science and technology, humans have learned to control their world in such a way that we increasingly have become independent of nature. Instead of the mutual dependency between humans and nature, we have developed a mode of living in the world in which nature has become an object for human interests. Nature has been conceived as a resource, which can be exploited to suit our interests and purposes, or as a place for recreation in order to reduce the stress modern civilization has developed as a bi-product of our chosen way of life. Only in extreme cases has nature made us aware that it is actually more powerful than humans, but even in such cases, we tend to regard our dependency on nature as a problem to be overcome. It seems that humans cannot accept to live in a state of dependency. They will always attempt to act as God over against nature.

Perhaps more than anything else during the last few decades, it is the ecological crisis, which has awakened people from the dream that we can continue to act as God towards nature. The crisis is a problem, which simply will not disappear through increased knowledge and technology. Rather it seems to increase in proportion to the measures taken to limit the extent of damages. It has been said that the ecological crisis is not really of a technological nature; it is a crisis about values. The crisis is closely linked with our understanding about who we are and the values we choose in order to live by. Most deeply it is connected with our desire to see ourselves as standing in the center of the universe and be Masters of nature. Compared to humans, nature as such has no *intrinsic* value; we do not consider nature as our “home”, but more as a collection of items on a theatre stage – surroundings which can be replaced at our hearts’ desire because they have no meaning and value other than those that we choose to attach to them. They only have *instrumental* value.

Such a perception of life would have been different if we had taken our point of departure in a *creation faith*, which emphasizes that nature itself is included in the idea of salvation, and that it therefore also needs liberation from the destructive powers of sin and decay. From the perspective of a creation faith, nature would be seen as our *origin* and *home*. It is our common origin, which is the basis for our common future. If humans are to have any future at all, then this future is insolubly linked with the future of nature. It might well be true that nature could have a future apart from humans (some would even say that this would actually be best in the long run!). But from the perspective of us humans, it is important to realize that humans and nature live in a mutual state of dependency in which humans cannot live apart from nature. A religious identity, which is to include such a perspective, must build on a creation faith in some form or another.

b. *Religious Values as the Foundation of Ultimate Norms*

In his eco-philosophical writings, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess has distinguished between various degrees of ecological “depth” in the way we relate to nature.⁵ Most people are concerned about *how* to solve ecological problems: how to decrease CO₂ release into the atmosphere, how to prevent pollution from agriculture and industry, how to avoid unnecessary waste of limited resources, etc. Naess, however, has insisted on the need to go *deeper* than such issues. He insists that we have to learn to think deeply and ask *why* ecological problems arise in

⁵ Cf. Arne Næss, *Ecology, community and lifestyle*. Translated and edited by David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

the first place. What are the *basic causes* behind our ecological problems? What values do we adopt and what norms do we choose? Where do they come from, and are they acceptable in view of the situation in which we find ourselves in today's world?

As a philosopher, Naess is concerned about the basic questions in our relationship to nature. He wants to focus on the depth understanding of our basic conceptions, norms and values that actually ground our relationship to nature. Spinoza and Gandhi have heavily inspired Naess himself, and he chooses to deduce his norms and values on the basis of an interpretation of reality influenced by their lines of thinking. Other choices are however also possible. It might be equally possible to work out a "deep ecology" philosophy based on a Christian theology – or, for that matter, on the basis of other religious traditions. To Naess, the religious traditions represent invaluable resources to provide a basis for ecologically sound philosophies. Without such a *deep* thinking, values and norms will remain in a vacuum, allowing them to be used for convenient reasons apart from a specific foundation. Religious views are therefore indispensable for working out a basis for values and norms with regard to how we deal with ecological concerns.

c. *Nature Ethics and Human Commitment*

An interpretation of the relationship between religion and nature can be expressed through the idea of *covenant*. The idea of the covenant in this context has to do with the human commitment to act in such a way that the important religious values ("the will of God") will be the concern of the acting subject. An important task will then be to identify on a theological basis, which values should be considered primary. In my book, *Økoteologi*, I have attempted to identify such values through such concepts as *harmony*, *integration* and *wholeness*.⁶ The covenant refers to the idea that humans are *committed* to act in such ways that they promote values that strengthens harmony, integration and wholeness. It might certainly be possible to use other concepts as well, and to relate them to another framework than a religious (Christian) frame of reference.

The major issue is that within a *Covenant Theology*, the covenant is an expression of the human commitment and responsibility based on religious convictions. Humans do not stand out as an isolated species in the world, but as a member of a community to which we have a responsibility. The challenge of living in the world as a *Christian* individual, is to give reasons for and defend one's choice of values, norms and actions – not only to oneself, but to other people, to society, to the world which we consider our origin and home, *and* to the Creator who has given the breath of life to everything that lives. The Covenant idea represents the insurance that one ought to know in a public way what conditions there are for our living in the world, what values ought to be considered foundational, and what norms ought to be followed in our actions in the world. The covenant establishes certain conditions, thus making it known to everyone that we are actually *responsible* for our actions, and that these actions should be linked to basic values and norms. Perhaps the story from the book of Joshua in the Bible (ch.24) could be a source of inspiration for establishing a covenant between nature and the human society. Such a covenant would be of a religious nature because the divine presence is a reality in which all human relations, including the relation between people and nature. The religious content of the covenant is first and foremost expressed in the understanding of salvation, which insists that humans are responsible subjects; it is within the context of their relationship to nature that people show *who* they are and *what* they represent. And they need to do it in such a way that the hope for a common future is something that actually concern us and commit us to a responsible way of life.

5. Symbols of a Religious Ecology

⁶Roald E. Kristiansen, *Økoteologi* (København: Anis Publ Company, 1993).

The idea of responsibility and commitment is at the heart of an ecological theology. How should such a theology be established so that it could provide the foundation for real hope, not only to humanity, but also for the created world? There are many ways in which we can relate to nature, but not every one of them will include ecological concerns, which we would regard as desirable and necessary. Let us briefly consider some different forms of theological models inspired by some biblical symbols.

a. *The Ruler*

In the first story of creation in the Bible (Gen. 1), we find the idea that humans shall “have dominion” over the world of creation. In the words of blessing to humanity, God says, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (v.28). In the Christian tradition, these words constitute the background for the interpretation of our relationship to the world as its *Ruler* – we are the *Masters* of creation. We shall have *dominion* and we shall *subdue* the earth.

The idea of rulership is taken from the political ideal of old Israel. It is connected with a reality, which to a large extent was characterized by conflict and war, and with a society in which the ruler, the King, had total power and a self-evident right to use whatever means necessary to secure that his will was carried out. The political ruler ideal of one King is thus coupled with a theological conception of the One God in such a way that the latter is used as a religious way of legitimizing the social and political reality. Humans shall therefore rule over nature in the same way as the King rules his nation.

It has been pointed out that the idea of a human rulership over the world of nature represents an elevation of the position and value of the human being as such. But this “upgrading” of the human being as such can also go too far: if humans are created “little less than God” (Ps. 8), then it might be construed to mean that humans are actually closer to God than the created world. The values connected with nature may therefore be seen as lower in rank than values connected with humans and their interests – especially if they come into conflict! In such cases one soon realizes that the symbol of the ruler is founded on an extremely *anthropocentric* view: humans are at the center of the world because they stand *above* nature. Humans alone have the right to *conquer* the world and make it theirs by virtue of having been created in the image of God. When humans conquer the world, they will thus convert the world into an image of *man*. Nature will then tend to become a mirror image of us, serving *our* purposes for the sake of *our* interests.

If we understand humans as the creature as the pinnacle of creation, then also ethics will receive an anthropocentric basis. The purpose of ethics is to take care of *people's* interests, and the needs of nature is not taken into account, at least when they are seen as contrary to our own interests. The instrumentalist ethics builds upon the idea that the measurement of all things is the human and its interests (*homo mensura*). As such, the secular humanist ethics finds itself in precisely the same dilemma as a biblically founded ruler-ethics. An ecological point of view, which attempts to anchor human identity in the relationship to the created world of nature, represents a radical critique of such an instrumental ethics. It is confronted with the weakness that it focuses too strongly on the unique status of being a human, thus neglecting the role of nature in relation to our personal and social life-world.

b. *The Steward*

The second important motif in a Judeo-Christian theology of creation is the idea of Stewardship. The idea is based on Genesis 2 in which it is told that God put humans to *till* it and *keep*. The

words expresses the idea that have transferred to humans the *responsibility* for taking care of the natural world, a responsibility which logically presupposes that they have a superior position compared with the world of nature.

The positive aspect of this idea in the stewardship idea is the emphasis on the *nearness* and the *interdependence* between humans and nature. The land with everything that lives on it, is a gift from God til humanity, but as humans we have to receive that gift and use it in a responsible way. The human role is therefore not the majestic ruler, but the conscientious *farmer*. The farmer lives on his farm with the animals, and he knows very well that both he as well as the rest of society cannot survive unless he runs his farm in such a way that he cares for the land the all the animals. The farmer's task is to *cultivate*, connected to the word *culture*. Human culture thus depends on the close interdependency between humans and the land, that is, it presupposes that we assume responsibility for the way we cultivate the land and take of all animal- and plant life.

Although this sounds very ecologically sound, the stewardship model also has its limitations and weaknesses. The symbol of the steward has after all a superior position and the authority to do whatever needed in order to control one's field of responsibility. Thus nature is implicitly seen as passive and as dependent on receiving help from humans in order to establish harmony and order. The issue of *meaning* thus becomes a cultural *construct*; nature does not have any *inherent* meaning, as it needs the "farmer" to build meaningful structures into reality. The stewardship model is therefore built on an asymmetrical relationship between humans and nature, dominated by humans and their intervention in establishing structures of meaning on their own premises. Humans can do exercise their rights because they have been assigned the the *power* over nature.

Within the stewardship model, it is *society* – the world of *culture* – that is taken as the most important concern, not nature. The "farmer" symbol is used to express the basic idea in the way humans relate to nature, a symbol or metaphor taken from the farm community, a society of living creatures, which include the animal and plant world. But this community is built on human premises and is primarily concerned about building a *human* society with the help of other living creatures. The ethics of such a model is therefore of a functional character: the most important is that the farm is run well so that it produces whatever goods the human society needs.

c. *Friendship and Family*

"Friendship" signifies a relation between two or more parties that is characterized by equality and mutual dependency. A friendship presupposes that there is a mutual trust between the partners, and as such the idea of friendships is a meaningful symbol for an ecological theology. The symbol also has a biblical basis. Jesus calls his disciples "friends", not "servants" (John 15:15), in order to express the close relationship between them. In a similar way human can also conceive their relationship between other creatures as "friends". Thus we live in a community of friends with other livings creatures that have similar rights to live as we ourselves have in the world of creation. Humans live *within* the world of nature, not *above* it or *apart* from it.

Friendship signifies a form of philosophy of equality, which is necessary in an ecological context, but it is not the only valueable symbol in an ecological theology. Another important concept is the *family*, a classical symbol in the Christian theological tradition. In a family, words such as father, mother and child are all *relational* concepts. Nobody are fathers and mothers in themselves, but in their relationship to their children. In his conception of nature, Francis of Assisi uses such family relations to signify his relationship to nature: to animals and birds, as well as to the sun and the moon ("brother sun and sister moon"). In this way, he affirms that the relationship between humans and nature is characterized by a basic equality, and that their existence is woven in a closely-knit web of relations, which one cannot escape from.

If we base our ecological theology on such a philosophy of equality inspired by friendship and family metaphors, it becomes natural to regard the world of nature as *sacred*. Many theologians have hesitated to regard nature as sacred because of the temptation to attribute to nature a quality which properly only belong to God. But the biblical idea of sacredness is, after all, not reserved only for God: because God is holy, then the people are also holy, and the temple is holy because that is the dwelling place of God. Wherever God is present; God sanctifies the place of divine presence. Thus there is nothing wrong with calling nature “sacred” – it is sacred by virtue of God’s presence through the Holy Spirit, which creates and sustains all life.

The view of nature as sacred implies that it is possible to build an ecological ethics on the basis of a theology of sanctification. Life is in a religious sense to be conceived as sacred, and therefore inviolable. Albert Schweitzer, theologian, organist and missionary to Africa, expressed his ethical views in the word, “Respect for life!” These words could also be taken as a sound starting point for an ethic of an ecological theology, a *sanctification* of life as such. Our ethical task thus becomes to act in the world in accordance with the view that life is sacred, so that we always seek to respect and promote this basic value. Later we shall return to how this value can be expressed with regard to the view that a sound ecological life style is connected with a theology of sanctification.

6. Ecology, Friendship and Hope

a. *The Characteristics of a Friendship Community*

In an ecological theology, a close relationship between humans and nature is a basic assumption. Humans must learn to see themselves as surrounded by a community of friends, and as members of a global family where we live in relationships characterized by mutual interdependence. Some have criticized such a philosophy of equality as a form of “ecological fascism” because it does not permit any basic difference between people and animals. In the debate about Norwegian whaling, the well-known environmental activist, Paul Watson, has been declared an “ecological fascist” because he claims that there is no basic distinction between people and whales. All life forms have the same right to exist, and since we do not allow the hunting of people, one cannot therefore allow any hunting of whales either. And even more, if it really is the case that whales are a threatened species, he makes the argument that if one has to choose between the killing of a whale and a human person, the concern for the whale will be more important than the concern for the person. Humans are not any threatened species – they are actually a *threatening* species, and there is a significant qualitative distinction between these two concepts!

Does an ecological philosophy of equality represent a fascist point of view? Undoubtedly the danger is there, and in the case of Paul Watson and his “Rainbow Warriors”, it might seem as if he is very close to becoming an “ecological fascist”. The same may also be said about certain animal right activists, who in their struggle to protect the rights of animals, are in danger of denying the right humans have for securing a livelihood, which includes meat products. Throughout history, humans have been carnivores – meat eaters – just like other animals, but there hardly any more reason to criticize humans for eating meat, than it is to criticize lions and tigers! It is true that humans alone have the possibility to change their diet, but this possibility is hardly sufficient to make the assertion that therefore humans should really all become vegetarians. Such a choice should at least be built on another foundation than an ecological philosophy of equality.

In a Deep Ecological perspective such as spelled out by the philosopher Arne Naess, the idea of the basic equality of all life, is coupled with the need for a pragmatic differentiations of values connected with the way we see ourselves related to other living beings. All life has a value in and of itself. All life has *intrinsic value*, and is in principle independent of the use it may have for human persons. Humans, who live in a community of friends with other living creatures, cannot

therefore do as they please with other creatures. But at the same time, it is also important that we do not emphasize this equality in such a way that we become paralyzed in the ways in which we deal with the world. The important thing is that we have *an active respect for life*. We don't need to display a passive acceptance by leaning everything as it is.

The human person is a creature that actively transforms his or her reality. When we establish relations to other living beings, there will always be some relations that will be considered more important than others, e.g., by virtue of the degree of "closeness" or "familiarity" experienced in the relationships. We experience a higher degree of closeness and familiarity with the cow and horse, than we do with the mosquito and the wolf. If we use such criteria as "closeness" or "familiarity" as our point of departure, it becomes possible to differentiate the degree of our commitment to our fellow creatures. The degree of commitment will never be zero. It is not possible to say that humans have *no* obligation to another life form. Taking the mosquito as an example, we should not attempt to eradicate mosquitos because it is a nuisance to humans. The right to live is – if not absolute – at least a value of utmost importance so that one cannot deny it unless there are extremely strong reasons for doing so. Reasons based on a human desire for comfort is definitely not acceptable for eradicating life. So what satisfactory reasons could one imagine? It is probably not possible to give a definite answer to such a question. What is obvious is that one has to give reasons for one's choices in such a way, that one *publicly* and *critically* chooses one's values while continually allowing for feedback from others with an open mind. The point is that value choices must be publicly known, and that the reasons for one's choices should go as deeply as possible, and in accordance with one's *basic* values. The degree of closeness as a criterion to make priorities in value conflicts is a matter which not everyone will agree with. Therefore it will be necessary to be open and non-judgemental about one's choices, allowing for open criticism within the community of which one is a member. If it really is the case that our lives are interwoven in a network of close relationships, it entails an *ethical responsibility* to participate in the communal network where we become involved in our choices through mutual criticism and influence. This is in line with the above-mentioned idea of the *covenant*, which presupposes a community to which we are made responsible. The community's task is to hold us accountable for our choices of values and norms, as well as the way we choose to act on the basis of such values and norms. This is the consequence of accepting a view of life in which we participate in our fellow creatures' lives: because we participate in each other's lives, we also share the responsibility to take part in the way we choose our values and the way we express these values in concrete actions.

b. Sanctification and Ecological Life Style

Is there hope for humanity? The question is relevant in connection with the crisis humanity has developed both for itself, and for all other life forms on earth. Many people today are quite sceptical as to our future on earth, and even if we would like to be optimists, it is highly probable that the situation will be deteriorating further before they might become better. The ecological crisis is of such a nature, that the economic and political forces seem to be far stronger than all other forces taken together. Faces with the secular authorities that govern our world, it might seem as if being concerned about a philosophy of equality and an ecological theology, is a waste of effort. Why would a religious concern have any opportunity to influence the conditions deciding the future of the planet? No church, mosque or temple, are represented in the political and economic establishment that make those decisions, which will shape our future world. So why waste time and energy on something so futile as reflecting on the possibilities of grounding our values and norms in a religious philosophy of life? Does it matter what religious people think about nature and ecology – unless it is done by those people who themselves are in the seats of power that governs the way the world is run politically?

As important as such objections are, however, we need to realize that the ecological crisis will *not* be solved with the help of science, technology and economy. The crisis is primarily a crisis concerning *values*. And values and norms are always based on a perception of life, a world-view. In line with the Deep Ecological philosophy we have touched upon earlier, I would like to make the claim that the ecological crisis can only be solved if we take our world-views and our values into account. All environmental work should have its basis in “deep thinking”, i.e., in the life philosophy we perceive our basic values to be grounded. A value crisis is actually a *religious* crisis, because it is in our basic perception of life our values need to be anchored. Therefore it will never be sufficient to solve the problems in a “shallow” way, i.e., according to technological and scientific know-how. They must be solved at a *deeper level* where our actions are based on values that affirm our basic beliefs. The hope for a future, not only for humanity, but also for the whole created world, is therefore insolubly connected with religious and philosophical views. Thus it is a *theological* task to motivate believers to see their responsibility, and to accept this responsibility as *my own* responsibility. Hope cannot build on reason alone. Hope needs to be built on *faith*, a certainty about things not yet seen (cf. Hebrews 11:1) which gives reasons for doing something that might affect the future and change it. Faith as a conviction needs to be at our starting point. Faith could well be grounded in a religious point of view, but it also could be anchored in a secular view of life. The important thing is that it is a faith, which expresses itself in the form of a *hope* that rejects any escaping from the world. It is not possible to escape our problems and the feeling of hopelessness that the crisis has caused so far. The road to the future thus consists in hope: a hope that it matters, that we can make a difference whoever we are, and a hope that affirms that if we care, something will be demanded by us also at an individual level, by our choices and our willingness to act accordingly in all our individual life situations.

Choices and human will power does not arise out of nothing. Previously we have mentioned that choice and exercise of will could be interpreted as something that belongs to a religious context, i.e., within the religious *covenant community* which commit us in the context of a mutual responsibility for the common good. In a biblical sense the covenant community is *sacred*, and we might attempt to reflect further in this idea. What is being demanded by those who enter into this covenant community could be interpreted through the religious term, *sanctification*. Those who allow their lives to be changed by entering into a covenant community, in which the *common* life is the focus of our attention with regard to the choice of values and actions, have already taken a step into that process called “sanctification”. In its deepest sense, sanctification is grounded in hope, a hope for the liberation of ourselves as individuals, as social persons, and as participants in the natural community of all life. When the former leader of the Norwegian Society for the Protection of Nature (Norges Naturvernforbund), Dag Hareide, was asked what was at the heart of his Christian hope, he answered: “That death and suffering is not final in what happens to me – and that this earth will be good” (*Vårt Land*, Sept. 7, 1996). Then he pointed out what Martin Luther said in his old age as a response to the question that concerned him in his youth: how to find a benevolent God. Hareide found this question rather egotistical, and wanted to rephrase it to: how will God have his created world returned to him? The deepest problem concerning the ecological crisis is a creature that has lost sight of the meaning of life, a creature that insists on that it is *we* as humans who are at the center of our lives, doing whatever it takes to structure our world according to our needs. In this sense, the only solution to the ecological crisis is a *religious* solution: that we as creatures return to our divine origin, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and give up the idea that we need to force ourselves into a place at the center of the world.

The Christian hope might well be phrased in the above words, that “the earth will be good”. But if it is to be good, then humans need to let go of something within their own selves, namely, the belief in their own sufficiency, and the demand that we have a self-evident right to have all our needs fulfilled. This “letting go” of ourselves represents an idea which have long and rich traditions in Christian thought. The idea of the surrendering of our selves can even be found in

several other religious traditions, and in the Christian tradition it is usually associated with the idea of *sanctification*, and understood as a life long process of formation. Traditionally, the idea of sanctification has been at the heart of the pietists' program and understood in the context of the Pilgrim theology in which the sanctification process is a concern of the individual for the sake of the individual longing for eternal salvation. Sanctification in this context is the formation of the believer into the image of Christ; we are to become "like" Christ in words and deeds, thus living with peace in our minds and have peace with our neighbors. But sanctification is not only for the individual; it might also be interpreted as a *social* issue, which is closely linked with the task of structuring a just society and a prosperous relationship to nature. If life is sacred, it is a characteristic that makes it clear that one's choices of values and actions are a matter of *religious* concern, a choice having to do with how to perceive our lives deeply connected with the divine life. To act because life is sacred is thus the concrete actualization of the Christian hope, which assures us that we have reasons to believe in a future for the earth, and "the earth will be good". That the earth will be good means that it will be *liberated* from death and destruction, and that this liberation is meant for the *whole* earth: people, animals, plant life – everything created on this planet earth. Liberation means the realization of a new system of relationships between all things, and in such a vision of *salvation*, hope receives a realistic interpretation. In this Christian vision of salvation, we also receive the power of hope and motivation to transform our life situation, and act in such a way that ultimately "the earth will be good". In this way, God will have his created world returned to him.

Literature

There is a rather large literature on the issue of religion and nature. A couple of good historical surveys, although somewhat old, is found in Santmire, H. P. 1985: *The Travail of Nature*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, and Birch, C., Eakin, W. & McDaniel, J.B. 1990: *Liberating Life*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll.

A naturalist angle on ecological theology is found in Birch, C. & Cobb, J. 1981: *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge) and McDaniel, J.B. 1989: *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (John Knox Press, Louisville).

Literature aiming to develop a Christian spirituality related to nature and ecology is often found having Catholic authors, cf. Berry, T. 1988: *The Dream of the Earth* (Sierra Club Books, San Fransisco); Carmody, J. 1983: *Ecology and Religion* (Paulist Press, New York); Cummings, C. 1991: *Eco-spirituality: Toward a reverent Life* (Paulist Press, New York); Fox, M. 1988: *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (Harper & Row, San Fransisco).

Blant tilsvarende protestantiske forfattere finner en Bowman, D. 1990: *Beyond the Modern Mind: The Spiritual and Ethical Challenge of the Environmental Crisis* (Pilgrim Press, New York); Hendry, S.G. 1980, *Theology of Nature* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia); Moltmann, J. 1985, *God in Creation: A New theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Harper & Row, San Fransisco); Rasmussen, L. 1996. *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis books).

From the Greek-Orthodox tradition, one should mention the book by Limouris, G. (red.) 1990: *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy* (World Council of Churches, Geneva).

Many theologians view ecological issues as intimately connected to social structures, cf. Daly, H. & Cobb, J. 1989: *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Beacon Press, Boston); Küng, H. 1991: *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, London: SCM; McDonough, S. 1986, *To Care for the Earth: A Call for a New Theology* (Geoffrey Chapman, London); Moltmann, J. 1991: *Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World* (SCM, London) and Nash, J.A. 1991. *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon).

Within the ecumenical movement, one has tended to focus on the issue of social justice as the starting point for a theological concern for ecological matters, cf. Dichrow, U. & Liedke, G. 1989: *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice, and Peace* (World Council of Churches, Geneva). The World Council of Churches has a special program for the study of the challenge from ecology to Christian faith and practice.

Feminist theology regards the human relationship to nature and God as closely connected with the question of how men and women relate to each other. Important contributions are: McFague, S. 1993, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis); Robb, C. 1991: *Covenant for a New Creation: Essays in Religion and Public Policy* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll); and Sölle, D. 1984, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia).

A series of books have been published under the heading, *World Religions and Ecology* (Cassell 1992). They discuss the interpretations of nature as found in different religious traditions, and the foundation for ethical responsibility humans have towards the environment.