CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS APPROACH

The human community is in search of new and sustaining relationships to the earth amidst an environmental crisis that threatens the very existence of all life forms on the planet. While scientists, economists, and policymakers are debating the causes and solutions of this crisis, the facts of widespread destruction are causing alarm in many quarters. Indeed, from some perspectives the future of human life itself appears to be threatened. From resource depletion and species extinction to pollution overload and toxic surplus, the planet is struggling against unprecedented assaults. This is aggravated by population explosion, industrial growth, technological manipulation, and military proliferation heretofore unknown by the human community. From many accounts the basic elements that sustain life sufficient water, clean air, and cultivatable land are at risk. The role of religion in the solution of the existing crisis between man and nature is crucial.

For many people, an environmental crisis of this complexity and scope is not only the result of certain economic, political, and social factors. It is also a moral and spiritual crisis which, in order to be addressed, will require broader understanding of ourselves as creatures of nature, embedded in life cycles and dependent on ecosystems. Very often
the argument is that a spiritual revolution, a new religion is needed which will teach men to regard all nature as divine and man as only one of God's creatures.

Here 'religion' is understood as those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation. Teachings can be marked as 'religious' in the way they assert that people are essentially connected to a Supreme Being whose authority is distinct from worldly powers. Some religions, for example, Buddhism spell it as an achievement of a state of consciousness that transcends the attachments and passions of our ordinary social egos. Religious attitudes thus turn on a sense of what Paul Tillich calls 'ultimate concern'.

Spiritual teachings have celebrated and linked us to the non-human world, reminding us of our relation with air, water, and fellow living beings, that we are part of nature. Many people agree that religious beliefs provide primary values concerning our place in the universe, our obligation to other people and other forms, and what makes up a truly 'good' life. As the historian Lynn White observed,

"What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion."\(^1\)

\(^1\) Lynn White, Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 1967) 1204
On the question as to whether 'we ought to pay any attention for the needs of posterity', Passmore argues that 'men do not need religion to justify their concern for the future'. That concern, he says, arises out of their character as loving human beings. "Religion, indeed, tell its adherents—whether in the accents of the East or of the West—to set such concern aside; 'to take no thought for the morrow'. In short, the faithful cannot hope by recourse to Revelation, Christian or Muslim, to solve the problems which now confront them."

Religion has a part to play too in tackling the environmental crisis and this, I show from a quick survey into some of the world's religions. However, I wish to carry out a lengthy discussion of Christianity. It by no means follow that this religion provides better guidance in our relation with nature. It is rather direct continuity from Passmore's understanding of the 'Western traditions'. The threat of global ecological collapse need not lead us to abandon our religions or our religious traditions. Rather it could be a major stimulus to their revitalization. For many, an important component of the current environmental crisis is spiritual and ethical. It is here that the religions of the world may have a role to play in cooperation with other individuals, institutions, and initiatives that have been engaged with environmental

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3 Ibid, p100
4 Ibid, 1974, p 110
issues for a considerable period of time. Religions are beginning to respond in remarkably creative ways. They are not only rethinking their theologies but are also reorienting their sustainable practices and long-term environmental commitments. In so doing, the very nature of religion and of ethics is being challenged and changed.

When the Parliament of the World’s Religions convened in Chicago in 1993 and formulated its consensual “Declaration toward a Global Ethic,” it included in its commitment to “a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace.” It affirmed those ‘ancient guide lines for human behaviors which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the conditions for a sustainable world order.’ It spoke of the ‘interdependent’ nature on the ‘whole’ of life and emphasized ‘respect for the community of living beings’ and ‘preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.’

A look into some of the teachings of the religions, though in passing, reveals diverse views towards nature. In Hinduism, the Vedas and the universal laws of nature which control the universe and govern the cycles of creation and dissolution were made

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5 Pamela Smith, What Are They Saying About Environmental Ethics?, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, NJ, p67

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manifest by the All-knowing One. By His great power were produced the clouds and the vapors. After the production of the vapors, there intervened a period of darkness after which the Great Lord and Controller of the universe arranged the motions which produce days, nights, and other duration of time. The Great One then produced the sun, the moon, the earth, and all other regions as He did in previous cycles of creation. 

(Rigveda 10:190-1-3)

The Hindus accept the whole creation as the unfolding of the supreme one into many. To them, the worlds in the heaven, all the planets and stars, and the sun and the moon were created by Visvakarman, who also made earth with its animals, birds, trees, flowers, rivers, mountains and, of course, man and left them all to interact, develop and evolve. This perception of man is represented in Vedas:

Born to Thee, on Thee move mortal creatures;
Thou bearest them- the biped and the quadruped;
Thine, O Earth, are the five races of men, for whom,
Surya (Sun) as he rises spreads with his rays
The light that is immortal.

(Atharvaveda, 12.1.15)

\(^7\) O. P Dwivedi, B N Tiwari, Environmental Crisis and Hindu Religion, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1987, p 43
This verse in *Atharvaveda* establishes that the earth is not only for human beings to enjoy but also for all other creatures. This view is further substantiated by *Upanishadic* ideology:

From Him, too, gods are manifoldly produced,
The celestials (sadhyas), men, cattle, birds,
The in-breath and the out-breath, rice and barley austerity,
Faith, truth, chastity, and the law.

*(Mundakopopanishad, 2.2)*

The most important aspect of Hindu theology, though, is the association accorded to different species with deities. Most importantly, it is believed that Supreme Being is actually incarnated in various species.

This form is the source and indestructible seed of multifarious incarnations within the universe, and from the particle and portion of this form, different living entities, like demi-gods, animals, human beings and others, are created.

*(Srimad-Bhagavatam, 1.3.5)*

Traditionally Hindus have not only considered the whole of the animal world as God's creation, but they have been advised by the seers to treat all other species as their own children. The following verse illustrates:

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8 IBM
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One should look upon deers, camels, monkeys, donkeys, rats, reptiles, birds, and flies as though they were their own children, what is that which distinguishes from those (children).

(Srimad-Bhagavatam, 7.14.9)\textsuperscript{10}

There are numerous traditions in Hinduism, which affirm particular rivers, mountains, or forests as sacred. ‘Brahman, the ultimate reality is understood as the ‘soul’, or inner essence, of all things’.\textsuperscript{11} The basic recurring theme in Hindu mythology is the creation of the world by the self-sacrifice of God—'sacrifice' in the original sense of 'making sacred'—whereby God becomes the world, which, in the end, becomes again God. This creative activity of the Divine is called 'lila', the play of God, and the world is seen as the stage of the divine play. Like most of Hindu mythology, the myth of lila has a strong magical flavour. Brahman is the great magician who transforms himself into the world and he performs this feat with his 'magic creative power', which is the original meaning of maya in the Rig Veda.\textsuperscript{12} It is in the concept of lila, the creative play of the gods, Hindu theology engages the world as a creative manifestation of the divine.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p. 100
The Buddhist religion revolves around compassion, respect and tolerance for every human being and all other creatures that share this planet. This is exemplified in a Metta-Suttam prayer:

As the mother protects her child even at the risk of her own life, so there should be mutual protection and goodwill, which is limitless among all beings. Let limitless goodwill prevail in the whole world—below, all around, unmarked with any feeling of disharmony and discord.\(^\text{13}\)

Buddhists regard survival of all species as an undeniable right because as co-inhabitants of this planet, other species have the same right for survival that human beings enjoy. On the other hand, a positive attitude causes happiness and peace. Buddhism is a religion of love, understanding, and compassion, and is committed to the ideal of nonviolence. As such, the religion attaches great importance to conservation and protection of the environment of the environment.

Buddhists avoid cruelty to other living things and exploitation of nature beyond the limit of one’s survival. They demonstrate that unmindful negligence of these principles of right living may lead to chaos resulting in environmental crisis.

Islam holds that humanity does have a choice in our interaction with nature. If they choose to pollute the environment and do harm to living creatures for earthly comforts, the believers in the holy Qu’ran will

\(^\text{13}\) Dwivedi, O.P., Environmental Ethics, Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House, 1994, p. 57
face an obvious truth. Islam permits the use of the natural environment, but this utilization should not involve unnecessary destruction, Humans are not the owners, but the maintainers of the due balance and measure which God provided for them and for the animals that live with them. In Islam, the Holy Qu’ran and the divinely inspired work of Prophet Muhammad establish the foundation and rules for the conservation of nature.14

The East Asian traditions of Confucianism and Taoism, founded by Kung Fu Tzu or Confucius and Lao Tzu respectively remain, in certain ways, some of the most life affirming in the spectrum of world religions. They have been treated as ideal for its ecological sympathies. Mary Evelyn Tucker has asserted that: “While Taoism and Confucianism are quite different in their specific teachings, they share a worldview that might be described as organic, vitalistic and holistic”.15 Confucianism was the philosophy of social organization, of common sense and practical knowledge. It provided Chinese society with a system of education and with strict conventions of social etiquette. One of its main purposes was to form an ethical basis for the traditional Chinese family system with its complex structure and its rituals of ancestor worship. Taoism, on the other hand, was concerned primarily with the observation of nature and the

14 Ibid, p48
15 Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ecological Themes in Taoism and Confucianism” in Tucker and Grim, Eds, P 151
discovery of its Way, or Tao. Human happiness, according to the Taoists, is achieved when one follows the natural order, acting spontaneously and trusting one's intuitive knowledge. The movements of the Tao are not forced upon, but occur naturally and spontaneously. Spontaneity is the Tao's principle of action, and since human conduct should be modelled on the operation of the Tao, spontaneity should also be characteristic of all human actions. Acting in harmony with nature thus means for the Taoists, acting spontaneously and according to one's true nature. It means trusting one's intuitive intelligence, which is innate in the human mind just as the laws of change are innate in all things around us.

Taoism is primarily a cosmic religion, the study of the universe and the place and function of man and all creatures and phenomena in it. Nature is regarded as possessing worth or value 'for its own sake', and human interference should be minimal, if not nil in Taoist thinking. In Taoism the central idea is relationship. We cannot approach nature as a thing to be mastered but as a partner in a relationship. The goal is to become natural part of the original order. The way to discover that original order is to turn to nature. Early Taoist philosophers left the cities to learn from nature and primitive people living in remote mountain villages. They hoped to eventually bring human civilization into the natural order.

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16 Cooper, J.C., Taoism: The way of the mystic, Northampronshire: The Aquarian Press, Tucker, P154-155
In Taoism, Nature is taken to be infinitely wise, infinitely complex, and infinitely irrational. One must take a yielding stance and abandon all intellectual preconceptions. The goal is wu wei, doing nothing contrary to nature. Nature does not need to be perfected or improved. It is we who need to change; we need to come into accord.\textsuperscript{18}

Confucianism emphasizes the interrelationship of the ‘human order’ and the natural order and strives for a balanced reciprocal ideal.\textsuperscript{19} The seamless interconnection between the divine, human, and natural worlds that characterizes these traditions has been described as an anthropocosmic worldview. There is no emphasis on radical transcendence as there is in the Western traditions. Rather, there is a cosmology of a continuity of creation stressing the dynamic movements of nature through the seasons and the agricultural cycles. This organic cosmology is grounded in the philosophy of ch'i (material force), which provides a basis for appreciating the profound interconnection of matter and spirit. To be in harmony with nature and with other humans while being attentive to the movements of the Tao (Way) is the aim of personal cultivation in both Confucianism and Taoism. (It should be noted, however, that this positive worldview has not prevented environmental degradation (such as

\textsuperscript{18} Internet source
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p158
deforestation) in parts of East Asia in both the pre-modern and modern period.)

Most indigenous peoples have environmental ethics embedded in their worldviews. Native religions or tribal religions de-center the human beings from the scheme of things called nature. They believe that spiritual forces permeate the things they see around them—stones, trees, rivers, etc. and living peacefully and even at times, appeasing among these inspired beings is part of the wisdom of life. Although today, with the advent of Christianity, the belief is slowly diminishing, the people of Longkhum village in Nagaland (North East India) used to worship nature. There is a place called the “Longnangba”, literally meaning—“piling up of stones”. Here they worship the stones and the trees. Anyone walking through that place must take not to fall down or else a bad omen befalls on that person. If trees are cut down, it angers the deity and as such he causes big thunderstorms. Whenever there was a thunderstorm, the people would say, “today somebody has displeased the god.” People gives life offering like fowls, eggs etc.

The religious views at the basis of indigenous life-ways involve respect for the sources of food, clothing, and shelter that nature provides. Gratitude to the creator and to the spiritual forces in creation is at the
heart of most indigenous traditions. The ritual calendars of many indigenous peoples are carefully coordinated with seasonal events such as the sound of returning birds, the blooming of certain plants, the movements of the sun, and the changes of the moon.

For instance, the Akas of Arunachal Pradesh (of North-East India) identify the higher gods with the four major forces of nature: the Sky, the Mountain, the Earth and Water. These four control a hierarchy of deities under them. Each deity performs his well-defined role and ensures protection to his devotees. Earth is hard yet bountiful and gives them food. The sky above is the great protector who, when necessary, sends thunder and rains. The mountains around fill the people with deep feelings of awe and reverence, the waters of the rivers, similarly, appears so powerful that man can hardly challenge them. The mountain and sky are the man-gods while earth and river are woman-goddesses. Each of these gods and goddesses has a qualifying term of address of ‘father’ (Au) and ‘mother’ (Ain).²⁰

Many writers have attributed the origin of caring about nature to Mysticism. It is commonly defined as the doctrine or belief that through contemplation and love man can achieve a direct and immediate consciousness of God or of divine truth without the use of reason or of the ordinary senses. Mysticism is understood as a method of realization of the Ultimate Reality. It is defined as the habit or tendency of religious

thought and feeling of those who seek direct communion with God or the divine.\textsuperscript{21} It is concerned with the nature of reality, the individual's struggle to attain a clear vision of reality, and the transformation of consciousness that accompanies such vision. Mysticism is found in all great religions of the world. According to the Upanishads, Knowledge is an enquiry into of the mystery of the 'ultimate reality' and it cannot be fully described in language. This reality, called Brahman, is the unifying concept, which gives Hinduism its essentially monistic character in spite of the worship of numerous gods and goddesses.\textsuperscript{22} According to Plotinus, mysticism is 'a flight of the alone to the alone'. This shows that in mystical method the individual establishes personal relation with the Ultimate Reality. He forgets the world and even himself in the devotion to God.

It is also the characteristic of mysticism that after its experience the individual feels complete satisfaction. In the words of J.H. Leuba, 'To realize the presence of the God of love is the mystic's method of security of the essential wants'.\textsuperscript{23}

Passmore admits that although 'nature-mysticism, with its veneration of nature as sacred or divine, is incompatible with the central,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Chambers 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Dictionary
\item[23] Leuba, J.H., The Psychology of Religious Mysticism, p120
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Christian or scientific, Western tradition, it had nevertheless had a continuing importance. Mysticism, he continues, has helped in establishing the value of contemplative enjoyment of nature and has insisted on the unifying links between human life, on the one hand, and the life of nature on the other. On the contrary, in his chapter ‘Removing the Rubbish’, Passmore includes spiritual conceptions of nature, such as ‘nature mysticism’, among the (intellectual) ‘rubbish’ that needs removing if we are to address environmental issues rationally and practically. He argues:

“In so far as ecological problems can be solved only with the help of scientific discovery and technological invention, they can be solved only within the Western rational tradition. Mystical contemplation will not reveal to the chemist the origins of the Los Angeles smog nor enable the engineer to design an effective device for reducing its intensity.... Mystical contemplation will not clean our stream or feed our peoples’.

To a Christian, the world in which we live in belongs to God. God is revealed as moral in character, and humans are created in a relationship with God where they must give account to him. People are not autonomous but accountable to the Maker of all things. They are the ones

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24 Passmore, p28  
25 Ibid. p194
to whom this world has been given as a gift and humankind must care for this gift. This care can be referred to as stewardship. The manner in which we treat the gift expresses our attitude toward the one who gave it. Mankind is placed into a garden, which can be described as a web of life. They are dependent upon the web for their survival; if humans violate the moral and natural laws of the web of life they do so at their peril. As a result human beings are to treat the gift of creation in a morally responsible manner. In fact, it is believed that a time will come for “destroying those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:18).

At the very beginning God gives to the man the task of naming the animals. This demonstrates God’s desire to challenge the man’s understanding of the world around him. Prehistoric record of the Creator’s activity describes an event referred to by the theologians as the Fall. This event is absolutely essential to our understanding of nature as we find it around us today. Because of man’s sin in the garden everything has changed for the worse. Life is now marred and scarred. The burden of sin and death now ruin a formerly perfect world.

The Christian view and attitude has been blamed for the ecological crises. In the year 1966, the historian Lynn White addressed the American Association for the Advancement of Science on 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' and laid the blame squarely at the feet of
Christianity. The population explosion, pollution and 'the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage' are 'at least partly to be explained as a realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature.' Although several scholars have exposed weaknesses of White's position, elements of his argument still prevail in discussions about the environment and Christianity. For White, Christianity accepted this biblical view of creation, fostering the attitude that human beings transcend nature and may exploit it. He argues that this attitude has shaped the development of modern Western science and technology, which have posed threats to our environment.

The rejection of pantheism is seen as one of the greatest factors in Christians' treatment of the earth. Pantheistic, or pagan, religions worshipped many gods instead of one omnipotent deity. Many of these gods were associated with nature, which sanctified nature. Animism believed that everything on Earth, such as animals, rocks, plants, rivers, and people, was invested with a spirit. It stated that all must live in harmony and be treated with equal respect. Animists communicated with the spiritual beings through prayer. Some tribes made offerings to the spirits. Animists are also opposed to wasting any element of a spirit, which has been sacrificed.

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26 Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" Science March 10, 1967, Vol 155, Number 3767, p 1205
Polytheism was replaced by monotheism. The specific deities, with their sprites and nymphs, were removed; in their place was one God, transcendent over everything. This God created nature; He also gave Him power over nature. Because of this, Christians refused to identify God with nature, which in turn made nature less sacred.

White comments on the differences between pantheism and monotheism:

“In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it appeased. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.” 27

This view has been disputed. Scholarly analysis say that the author of Genesis 1:26 did not have abuse of nature in mind when he wrote this section. The sections of Genesis, which some people claim are the basis for a bad ethos of nature, can be read otherwise. It can be interpreted as telling humans to manage the land so that they may sustain themselves

27 ibid. p.1206
and pass an intact ecosystem to their children. However, the reader does not always perceive the author's original meaning. What the author meant might be different than what the reader interprets the author to mean.

Charles M. Murphy asks his readers, "Is the Bible perpetuating a misguided Anthropocentrism as well as encouraging the continued exploitation of the planet?" His answer relates God's intention in giving humanity dominion over nature: dominion means, "to care for" in this context, not to exploit. Would it make sense for the Bible to advocate the exploitation of nature? Humans may have dominion over the earth, but as any leader or king knows, dominion requires responsible treatment of subjects, or else the dominion cannot exist.

Some people believe that while Christianity may be monotheistic, it has a God, which is panentheistic. Panentheism is the belief that God is in everything, and everything is in God. God can be seen in nature because He made everything that is natural. Therefore, it makes no sense to separate God from nature, or to harm nature, since doing so would indirectly harm God.

Another argument against positive Christian attitudes towards nature is Eschatology. The early Christians strongly felt that Jesus'...
second coming was imminent. They did not pay attention to earthly things because they were more concerned with preparing for Jesus' second coming. The counter-argument states that eschatology is not responsible for a weak ethic towards the earth. In fact, since God created the earth, then it should be given as much attention as anything else, which God has created. Although it is true that the earth is a creation of God, and it would make sense that nature should be treated well by a person who is preparing for the second coming of Jesus, this was not a concern for the early Christians, who were more occupied with spiritual matters.

Dualism is another barrier between the Christian and reverence towards nature. Dualism is the thought that things can be divided into two parts, one of which is always inferior to the other: evil and good, time and eternity, matter and spirit, non-human and human. With each pair, the first notion is devalued, while the second is held in high regard. Indeed, it is hard to give equal thought to two opposites. In this respect, the dualism is between God and earthly concerns. However, if one considers the previous notion that God is connected to the earth and its creatures because God made them, and then there should be no duality between God and nature. Nevertheless, things of the mind and spirit are frequently separated from things of the earth and life without spirit (i.e., plants and animals). The interpretation of the biblical texts is up to the reader's
religion. In Catholicism and some Protestant religions, the Bible's meaning is interpreted by a particular figure, such as the Pope. In other Christian religions, the reader interprets the Bible. Either way, if the interpretation supports stewardship of the earth, then there is no conflict between environmental interests and religious thought. However, if the interpretation views the texts as supporting man's exploitation of nature, then there is a problem between the Bible and the planet. The dilemma lies in the interpretation.

Modern Biblical scholarship, however, have come up with two traditions- the P and J traditions that can be used to explain the two creation stories contained in the book of Genesis (1-2:4, 2:5-25). Philosophers, ecologists, scientists need to be aware of this view- also known as the "Wellhausen hypothesis". The J: Yahwist tradition is the earliest tradition and it belongs to the southern kingdom of Judah and is generally characterized by an elegant style for the colorful presentation of scenes and dialogues, deep psychological and theological insights and also an unabashed use of anthropomorphism.

When it looks back at the relevance of the creation of man, an item in proto-history, and the election of the patriarchs and the event of the Exodus, items in history, all history is interpreted by it as serving God's specific plan for man through the chosen people.30

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The P: Priestly source is attributed to the priests of Jerusalem, hence its concern is largely liturgical; its themes center on the cultic life of Israel.

It is fond of genealogies, chronological precisions and minute descriptions of ritual elements. It is also careful to avoid the anthropomorphisms of the J source...Hence there are a host of prescriptions for ritual and legal cleanliness.\(^{31}\)

Both the viewpoints are two separate, powerful and distinctive approaches but somewhere down the line they got mixed up which is responsible for the misinterpretation of the creation stories.

Passmore has based a number of arguments and defenses on the accusation of Lynn White too. According to Lynn White the roots of our ecological crisis lie in the ‘Judaeo-Christian’ belief that man, being made in God’s image, is set apart from nature, and that the entire physical creation was brought into being for human benefit and rule. The immediate roots of the crisis are to be found in the 19th century coalition of science and technology. Pagan animism involved respect for the guardian spirits of trees, streams, and hills; Christianity allowed its adherents to disregard the feelings of natural objects, and with Christianity-

\(^{31}\) ibid
"The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated. Man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled."\textsuperscript{32}

He says that we cannot solve our problems with more science and technology. At the end of his article, Lynn White suggests two things we can do to help resolve the environmental crisis through religion: find a new religion, or rethink our old one\textsuperscript{33}. He hints at adopting Zen Buddhism, saying that its thoughts on nature are opposite those of Christianity, but he says that this religious philosophy is deeply rooted and conditioned in Asian tradition. He is therefore doubtful of its validity in the Western world. He then suggests that we look at Saint Francis of Assisi, who tried to dethrone man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures.\textsuperscript{34}

What if we took Francis's thought and reconsidered it? White states "we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man".\textsuperscript{35} While Christianity might not actually or explicitly state that nature serves man, many people understand Genesis to mean that humanity has dominion over the Earth. More specifically, this is often

\textsuperscript{32} ibid. p.190
\textsuperscript{33} Lynn white, P. 1206
\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} ibid.
interpreted as the right to exploit the Earth. Even if the author of Genesis didn’t mean for the account of creation to suggest exploitation, this notion is often read into it.

Passmore rejects White’s view that the Old Testament must be interpreted as exploitative, though he holds that it does not forbid despotic attitudes, and that the laws requiring various forms of consideration for animals are either responses to heathen rituals or motivated by concern for property. He also refutes the view that this Christian attitude is rooted in Judaeo-Christianity.

“If then one can speak of ‘Christian arrogance’ in supposing that all things are made for men, it must be with the proviso that it is not Hebraic-Christian but Graeco-Christian ‘arrogance’; its roots do not lie, as Origen and many others after him have supposed, in teachings which derive from Judaism and are taken over from the source by Christianity. It is one thing to say, following Genesis, that man has dominion over nature in the sense that he has the right to make use of it: quite another to say, following the Stoics, that nature exists only in order to serve his interests.”

In the article,”The Judaeo-Christian tradition” Arthur Peacocke and Peter Hodgson have summarized the fundamental Judaeo- Christian beliefs about God, humanity and nature that are relevant to the environmental debate. They say that the material world is essentially

36 Passmore, John, 1974, p17
good, ordered and of value to God. Nature is desacralised, revalued and historicized. It is not to be worshipped for itself but valued as God’s creation. God created human beings in His own image and likeness, free beings responsible for their actions. He appointed them stewards over the earth and gave him the fruits of the earth for their own use. God’s cares for the world and cares for it through the agency of humanity. Human beings have fallen from God’s grace and are prone to evil.

Passmore sets out to argue the fact that the Hebraic Christianity is all right and rather blames the Greek influence. To drive his point home, he gives a step-by-step progression of different ideologies of philosophers with Greek influence. He says that Genesis has often been blamed as the source and origin of the West’s ecological troubles. He observes that the accusation made against the Western attitudes to nature is that it is infected with arrogance. Genesis, Passmore admits, tells man not only what they can do but also what they should do. God creates man and tells him: “To have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’ (Genesis 1:26) He also issues a mandate to mankind to “be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28)
Passmore points out the first creation story as telling us that man was given dominion over the animals. On the other hand the second story says that they were created as man's auxiliaries, as 'helpmeet for them', where Adam is represented as giving names to the animals. He then points out that in primitive thought to have possession of a thing's name is to have power over it. Here Passmore tries to show that despite the fact that the Old Testament (O.T.) insists man's dominion over nature, God did not leave the fate of the animals entirely in man's hands. There is evidence that God gave 'every green herb' as food to 'every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air and to everything that creepeth upon the earth.' Even when God flooded the earth, God took pains to ensure the preservation of the beasts as much as men. Proverbs 12:10 teach men to care for their sheep and cattle. The image of the good shepherd whose flocks 'will not want' comes as naturally to the lips of the psalmist as it does to Ezekiel.

Passmore presents two possible interpretations to this Old Testament (O.T.) view about man's dominion -

1. Man as an absolute ruler takes care of the world as far as he benefits.
2. Man as a good shepherd takes care of the living things over which he rules for their own sake, governing them not with force but in the manner

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37 Passmore, p8
38 Passmore, p8

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of a good shepherd anxious to preserve them in the best condition for his master.

Though the second one, he says, has recently come into favour, earlier the first one was more predominant. The first view is the critics' base for their accusations. Going by the first view, Passmore claims that,

"Although the Old Testament, I have said, by no means suggest that whatever exists was created for man's sake, there is one point on which it is absolutely clear: nature is not sacred."\(^{39}\)

For Passmore, nature in itself is not divine because man rules over it. Unlike Eastern religions, he says, the religion of the Hebrews recognizes a sharp distinction between God and nature. Man's dealings with nature are sharply separated from his dealings with God. It is his relationship with God, which really matters. The Hebrew God is transcendent not immanent: he creates and rules nature but is not to be identified with it. The Hebrews did not consider nature as having a 'mysterious life' and this certainly left man free to exploit it without any qualms like other societies.

Passmore insists, "Nothing is sacred in this tradition except God and what, like Sinai, is specifically dedicated to God."\(^{40}\) God owns

\(^{39}\) Ibid. p9

\(^{40}\)
everything but 'man is at liberty, under a special charter from God, to exploit it as he wills' unless God puts certain restrictions to some.

'Nature was something, and God quite another.' This was a point on which both the Jews and Christians agreed, and this agreement, Passmore says, was of fundamental importance in determining the attitudes of the West.

Understandings of nature in the western world can roughly be divided (with some inevitable overlap) into five historically important categories: nature as a physical place; nature as the collective phenomena of the world or universe; nature as an essence, quality and/or principle that informs the workings of the world or universe, nature as an inspiration and guide for people and source of authority governing human affairs, and, finally, nature as the conceptual opposite of culture.

Passmore emphasizes two points on which the Jews and Christians differed. First, the Old Testament, unlike so many Christian theologians, does not set up an unbridgeable gap between man and nature. Secondly, it is uncompromisingly theocentric: nature exists not for man's sake but for the greater glory of God. It is here, Passmore points out:

"the Christian separation of man from the animals and the Christian view that nature was made for man, lies the seed of an attitude to..."
nature far more properly describable as 'arrogant' than the purely O.T. conception of man's dominion.\footnote{Ibid. p12}

Christianity, says Passmore, with its God who took human shape is or tends to be anthropocentric. He is confident to say that the peculiarities of Christian attitudes to nature derive in large part from its man-centeredness. Passmore agrees with the critics of Christianity when they say that Christianity has encouraged man to think of himself as nature's absolute master, for whom everything that exists was designed. He does not agree however when they suppose that this is Hebrew teaching. He rather believes that it originates with the Greeks.

Traditional Greek religion does not encourage the view that man either was, or should seek to become, master of the world. Seeking mastery would "be hubris, an attempt on man's part to set himself up as a god: such presumption would undoubtedly bring calamities about his head."\footnote{Ibid., P13} The Greek Enlightenment however rejected this concept of hubris and so they maintained that animal life exists purely and simply for man's sake. To strengthen this point, Passmore brings in Aristotle as arguing in his Politics that 'plants are created for the sake of animals, and the animals for the sake of men; the tame for our use and provision; the wild, at least for the greater part, for our provision also, or for some other
advantageous purposes, as furnishing us with clothes, and the like'.\textsuperscript{45}
Aristotle takes this conclusion, we are told, to follow from the premise that 'nature makes nothing either imperfect or in vain'.

Man's place in nature was a major point of dispute between the Epicureans and Stoics. The Epicureans are shown as saying that it is quite absurd to suppose that the world- 'so foolish the design, contrived so ill' - was created by a God for human use.\textsuperscript{46} The Stoics, on the other hand, hold the view that all creatures are designed to serve man. Man is the only one who can make advantageous use of nature so they were created for them. The universe, as they saw it, is a vast body, providentially governed to serve the interests of only its rational members- men and gods, and as such free from moral censure.\textsuperscript{47}

Passmore admits that even the Graeco-Christian doctrine of nature does have practical guidance in two ways- conservative and radical. First, the conservative interpretation is that since God has designed everything for man's use, it is impious for man to change it. Men were free to use nature as they chose- provided they did not worship it as sacred- but otherwise it was best left alone, created as it was in the form most

\textsuperscript{45} Aristotle: Politics, trans. W.Ellis (London, 1912), bk.1, ch 8,1256b.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., P14
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p15
suitable for their needs. As for the radical interpretation, which he takes to be the crucial one, it understands that everything on earth is for man’s use and this gives him the liberty to modify nature, as he will. Cicero’s Balbus is referred to here saying that,

"we alone have the power of controlling the most violent of nature’s offspring, the sea and the winds, thanks to the service of navigation.... the rivers and lakes are ours...we give fertility to the soil by irrigating it, we confine the rivers and strengthen or divert their courses... by means of our hands we try to create as it were a second nature within the world of nature."\(^{48}\) Cicero foresaw man as a demi-god, constructing with his hands a new nature. Robert Jungk is also shown as presenting a similar attitude in the modern times that man is trying to take God’s place by recreating and creating a ‘man-made cosmos according to man-made laws of reason’.\(^{49}\)

Passmore, however points out that when Cicero talked of man taking control of nature, he (Cicero) did not see it leading to the creation of a science based-technology with its potential benefits as well as its potential dangers. In the 17th century, Passmore adds, Bacon and Descartes could see that this ‘second nature’ was not going to be all good only and that it had its potential dangers. Bacon started emphasizing that ‘knowledge itself is power’. He argued that learning should be referred to use and action, which he said, is true not only in the case of practical

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p18
\(^{49}\) Ibid
philosophy' as navigation, but also in the case of what Bacon called 'philosophy of universality'. Man would gain mastery over things only through intellectual knowledge and "overcoming her resistance not by force but by his intimate knowledge of her secrets". The dominion that was symbolized when God called upon Adam to give names to the animals was in the back of Bacon's mind when he thought of his projects for the advancement of science as restoring to man his original dominion over the animals.

Like Bacon, Descartes looked forward to new techniques, as successful as the old crafts, but based one science. What Descartes rejected, says Passmore, was the pious thought that God made everything for man.

'An infinitude of things exist, or did exist...which have never been beheld or comprehended by man and which have never been of any use to him'. He commits himself only to the much weaker position that 'there is nothing created from which we cannot derive some use'.

At this point Passmore says that Descartes inherits the Stoic ingredients in Christianity rather than its more distinctive teachings; man is lord of nature in virtue of his rationality, and that rationality has not been irremediably perverted by the Fall. From the beginning there were

objectors but their views did not prevail. The Baconian-Cartesian approach to nature dominated the West, at first merely as an aspiration, eventually as an achievement.

G.P. Marsh was the first to describe man's destructiveness as arising out of his ignorant disregard of the laws of nature. He said that nature in its original state was not adapted to supporting a civilization but man in order to civilize it was forced to transform it without any sense of guilt. Marsh and other ecologists saw that when man attempted to transform nature, they never do what they want to do, because nature is not a soft piece of wax. When man is trying to adjust one thing, many other harmful adjustments are taking place in nature.

Nature, in other words does not simply 'give way' to their efforts; adjustments occur in its modes of operation, and as a result their actions have consequences which may be as harmful as they are unexpected. 51

Engels also wrote that for every victory man has over nature, it takes its revenge on man. He understands that, in the process man by no means rule over nature like conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature- but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong

51 Passmore, p24
to nature, and exist in the midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in
the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able
to know and correctly apply its laws.' To Engels, ignorance and greed are
characteristic of capitalism for it is not at all concerned about the
consequences of its actions. He argues,

"Communism alone can save nature, through its destruction both of
capitalism and of Christianity- from the greater profits demanded
by the former, the 'senseless and unnatural' contrast between man
and nature typical of the latter."52

However, the Soviet Union, has shared the ideology of capitalism as
is evident in the attitude of the Soviet historian Pokrovskiy who says that,

"It is easy to foresee that in the future, when science and technique
have attained to a perfection which we are as yet unable to
visualize, nature will become soft wax in his [man's] hands which
he will be able to cast into whatever form he chooses."53

In the East, Japan regards nature as sacred and worships it directly.
Yet, this has not prevented Japan from developing an industrial
civilization. China was technologically inventive, yet the ideal of
conforming to nature has been very powerful in Chinese thought affecting
even everyday actions. The only startling exception being Hsun Tsu who
argues that it is not enough to let nature develop, conforming to it as it
does so; it will go astray unless man corrects it by acting upon it, just as
human beings will go astray unless they are educated.

52 Ibid, 25
53 Ibid

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Passmore commends the critics of Western civilization on their historical diagnosis about a strong Western tradition that man is free to deal with nature as he pleases, since it exists only for his sake. He says they are wrong in tracing this back to Genesis because Genesis and the Old Testament generally, tells man that he is, or has the right to be the master of the earth and all it contains. But it also insists that the world was good before man was created, and that it exists to glorify God rather than to serve man. Only with the influence of the Greek, Christian theology was led to think of nature as nothing but a system of resources, man’s relationship with which are in no respect subject to moral censure.

God had made nature for man’s use and it would be presumptuous to improvise on that. But a radical interpretation was that nature was there for man to modify and transform as he pleases. This was an interpretation of Bacon and Descartes, which was absorbed into the ideology of modern western societies, communist as well as capitalist and has been exported to the East.

The metaphysics that this thinking brought about considers man to be the soul agent and nature ‘a vast system of machines’ for man to use and mould as he pleases. Passmore states that this metaphysics in
particular is what the ecologists are rightly rejecting. But he clarifies that
this metaphysics alone cannot represent the entire western tradition.