



... The godless do not know how to act, or how to renounce. They have neither purity nor truth. They do not understand the right principles ... They say that the universe is an accident with no purpose and no God ... that life is created by sexual union, a product of lust and nothing else. Thinking thus, these degraded souls, these enemies of mankind - whose intelligence is negligible and whose deeds are monstrous - come into the world only to destroy. -- Bhagavad Gita

It is important today that theologians and others should begin to look at the Bible afresh, and to reassess its message about humanity and our relationship with the planet. A fresh reading of biblical texts about the created world order, its conservation and restoration, and some reflections on the cultural context in which these themes occur, not only in the Bible but also in other religious texts from neighbouring cultures, can tell us much about Christianity's real ecological ethic ... When the Bible's teaching on God's Creation and our place in it is duly digested, I believe that it cries out to us: 'you are fellow-creatures of everything else in the Cosmos. You have no right to exploit or destroy, but you have duties to all, under God to whom you are responsible.' -- Father Robert Murray

Many people today are calling for modern religion, and specifically Christianity, to be re-imbedded in the cosmos, so that religion might become a real force in providing the ethical and spiritual energy for the critical task of reversing the degradation of the Earth. -- Vincent Rossi

Do not mock anything God has created. All creation is simple, plain and good. And God is present throughout his creation. Why do you ever consider things beneath your notice? God's justice is to be found in every detail of what he has made. The human race alone is capable of injustice. Human beings alone are capable of disobeying God's laws, because they try to be wiser than God. -- Hildegard von Bingen, Scivas 1.2.29

The rest of Creation cries out against the evil and perversity of the human species. Other creatures fulfil the commandments of God; they honour his laws. And other creatures do not grumble and complain at those laws. But human beings rebel against those laws, defying them in word and action. And in doing so they inflict terrible cruelty on the rest of God's creation. -- Hildegard von Bingen

The Millennium coincides with a widespread yearning for individual and Earth healing. Individuals and societies, global and local, and the whole Earth community suffer as never before under unsustainable human impact. The healing ministry should be broadened to include the earth, the living soil, plants, animals, water, and climate, and the science and technology, which, when arrogantly misused, threaten the very continuation of our species and the biosphere as we know it. -- Edward Echlin

... religions have become increasingly 'otherworldly', and have ceased to fulfil their original role of linking people to their society, to the natural world, and to the all-encompassing cosmos. In the atomised society we have created, only interpersonal relationships make any sense, and even religion becomes little more than an interpersonal relationship between a now asocial an-ecological man and a God to whom is attributed these same characteristics. -- Edward Goldsmith

Unity with nature is the foundation of man's existence on the planet. It is the foundation of all social relationships between groups and people. Without it, the present civilisation, like those of the past, will move towards decline and decay. -- Edmond Bordeaux Szekely

As practised today, Christianity differs from many mainstream religions in Man's place in the Cosmos, Man's relationship to Gaia. Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Hinduism, recognise that Man is part of a complex web of life and that Man is part of Nature, not apart from Nature. This is not only a basic tenet of Eastern religions, but also the world-view of vernacular man and chthonic

societies.

Bhagavad Gita:

All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the forces of Nature; but the man lost in selfish delusion thinks that he himself is the actor.

The flaw in Christianity can be identified in Genesis where Man is given, or appears to be given, dominion over all Creation, ie granted the God given right to exploit all that is around him.

Genesis 1:28 (revised King James):

And God blessed them, and God said to them: '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.'

Recent translations tone down dominion and replace with rule, but the sentiment is the same, Man is still granted the authority to subdue the Earth.

Genesis 1:28 (New International):

God blessed them and said to them: 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

It is not only the Anglo-Saxon race, in Spanish the sentiment and tone are the same (Gen 1:28):

Y los bendijo Dios, y les dijo: Fructificad y multiplicaos; llenad la tierra, y sojuzgadla, y señoread en los peces del mar, en las aves de los cielos, y en todas las bestias que se muevan sobre la tierra.

Modern Christianity takes the spirituality out of Creation, once spirituality is divorced from Creation, Creation becomes material and resource for Man to exploit.

Philip Sherrard:

There is a relationship of interdependence, interpenetration, and reciprocity between God, Man, and Creation; and it is the loss by the Christian consciousness of awareness of the full significance of this relationship that is the basic cause of today's ecological crisis. Correspondingly, if the Christian Church is to offer a positive response to the challenge of this crisis, it can only be through reaffirmation of the full significance of this relationship.

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has recognised that we must reconnect Christianity with Gaia otherwise we will all be destroyed, that without this reconnection, the very foundations of the religion will be destroyed.

We must recognise the failure of all anthropocentric ideologies, which have created in men and women of this century a spiritual void and an existential insecurity, and have led many people to seek salvation in new religious and parareligious movements, sects or nearly idolatrous attachments to the material values of this world. Similar are the dangers for the survival of the natural environment. The careless and self-indulgent use of material creation by man, with the help of scientific and technological progress, has already started to cause irreparable destruction to the natural environment. The Orthodox Church, not being able to remain passive in the face of such destruction, invites through us, all the Orthodox, to dedicate the first day of September of each year, the day of the beginning of the ecclesiastical year, to the offering of prayers and supplications for the preservation of God's creation and the adoption of the attitude to nature involved in the Eucharist and ascetic tradition of the Church.

Medieval historian Lynn White has expressed similar sentiment. Highly critical of Christianity's role in today's ecological crisis 'Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt', he sees the solution lies beyond the technological dimension and involves addressing the spiritual and ethical

dimension, the position vis-a-vis man versus nature and his right to exploit:

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one ... We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence other than to serve man ... Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must be essentially religious whether we call it that or not.

Playing with nuclear fire and tampering with the genetic building blocks of life Man has not only abused Creation he has tried to adopt the mantle of God. The Fall of the Rebel Angels (1562) by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, shows abominable genetic mutations. Enoch in the Book of Watchers describes the rebel angels (watchers), led by Azazel and Semihazah, fornicating with Man and sharing forbidden secrets, spawning a genetic mutant race of giants that devour the earth 'took unto themselves wives ... to go unto them and to defile themselves with them ... They became pregnant, and they bore great giants ... the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth lay accusation against the lawless ones.' Azazel also 'taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals (of the earth) the working of them ...' and corrupted men in all manner of ways.

Eastern-Orthodox theologian and environmentalist Vincent Rossi:

What must be recovered above all is the vision - not only that religion needs to be imbedded in the cosmos, but also that the world is imbedded in God. For it is this loss that inevitably led to the separation of religion from the natural order.

Vernacular Man, chthonic societies recognise the importance of maintaining the order of the Cosmos and that Man as with the creatures and the world they inhabitant are all part of the Cosmos. His rituals, his religion, are all part of everyday living, everything is inhabited by the spirit, is sacred; to attempt to separate one from the other would be to attempt to create an artificial divide.

John Patterson:

In a Maori world-view ... there is no inbuilt domination of nature by humans. To start with, at least, all species are members of a single family. There is thus no fundamental dichotomy between humans and other creatures.

In Ladakh, religion permeates all parts of everyday life. It is not something separate, relegated to a special day in a designated building.

In The Way of Wyrd Anglo-Saxon man recognised that he and the world around him were part of a complex web of life. The early Celtic Christians saw the interweaving of their religion and the natural world. Celtic music, then and now interwove the spiritual and the natural world, harmonious, natural rhythms.

The early scholars St Ephrem the Syrian, St Dionysius the Areopagite, St Maximus the Confessor, Hildegard von Bingen all recognised the complex web of life and the oneness of Creation.

St Ephrem the Syrian (306-373) in a hymn wrote:

As the water surrounds the fish and feels it, So also do all natures feel God, He is diffused through the air, And with thy breath enters into thy midst. He is mingled with the light, And enters, when thou seest, into thy eyes. He is mingled with thy spirit, And examines thee from within, as to what thou art, In thy soul He dwells ...

St Ephrem the Syrian recognised that God permeates everything, we cannot separate God from his Creation. Therefore if we exploit His Creation, then we are exploiting and abusing Him. St Ephrem the Syrian also introduces the concept of oneness, familiar to Hindus and Buddhists.

Bhagavad Gita:

No work stains a man who is pure, who is in harmony, who is master of his life, whose soul is one with the soul of all.

St Dionysius the Areopagite (circa 500) defined hierarchy (The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy):

We have a venerable sacred tradition which asserts that every hierarchy is the complete expression of the sacred elements comprised within it. It is the perfect total of all its sacred constituents. Our own hierarchy is therefore said to embrace every every one of its sacred constituents.

William Blake's 'infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour.'

The hierarchy of St Dionysius the Areopagite is not the rigid authoritarian pyramid command structure as implemented by the Catholic Church and Big Business, it is a network concept where the interlinking of the parts forms the whole, and the whole creates the environment for the parts. Each component part contributes to the maintaining of the stability of the whole, as organs exist within an organism and cannot exist without, unlike Modern Man who is determined like Samson to bring the temple crashing down.

Real-world systems are self-organising networks. This is the only way to handle the complexity of the real world. Many business models are now moving towards this model of reality: semi-autonomous, self-organising groups that work within the corporate ethos under the guidance of a few simple rules; telephone networks have moved from centralised control to distributed control and are now beginning to move towards interconnected, self-organising local networks; the Internet is the self-organising, organic network par excellence.

St Maximus the Confessor (580-662) developed a concept which he called *diakosmesis*: that all we know about humanity and all we know about the universe are reciprocal. In contemplation, how we see the world is determined by how we see ourselves, and equally, how we see ourselves is determined by how we see the world. The model we have of the universe depends upon our view of ourselves. Each influences and permeates the other.

A concept similar to the Buddhist enlightenment. A Gaian, network concept where the embedded network is determined by its interactions with the surrounding network and in turn influences the surrounding network. A close parallel with subatomic physics where the behaviour of the particle is not determined until it is observed. The observer and observed are intimately linked and bound together.

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), Abbess of the convents at Bingen and Rupertsberg (which she established), was a philosopher, mystic, visionary, artist, poet, writer of treatises on theology, natural history, medicine, and composer of beautiful, haunting music. Describing herself as a 'feather on the breath of God', much of her work was derived from divine inspiration and visions. She saw that as God created all life, then all life must be permeated with His divine spirit.

Oh fire of the Holy Spirit, life of the life of every creature, holy are you in giving life to forms
... Oh boldest path, penetrating into all places, in the heights, on earth, and in every abyss,
you bring and bind together From you clouds flow, air flies, Rocks have their humours,
Rivers spring forth from the waters And earth wears her green vigour

Hildegard von Bingen saw that Creation existed before Man, that it could survive without Man, that Man needed Creation in order to survive, and that the only purpose of Man's appearance in Creation was to glorify God's work and to act as His steward. God had to give Man reason in order to enable him to admire God's work and to act as His steward, but Man then used his reason to decide that he was wiser than God and could improve upon His handiwork.

God created the world out of the four elements, to glorify His name. He strengthened the world with the wind. And he filled the world with all kinds of creatures. He then put human beings throughout the world, giving them great power as stewards of all Creation. Human beings cannot live without the rest of nature, they must care for all natural things.



Christian Theology and Gaia