

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved: Ronald O. Clarke, Professor of Religious Studies

This study examines a limited number of selected themes in Judeo-Christian, or Western, religious thought and their implications for man's use of land, with the objective of discovering the influence of Western religion on attitudes toward nature and land.

Five themes are examined: dominion of man; stewardship; contempt for, and rejection of, the earth as a suitable dwelling place for man (Contemptus Mundi); wilderness; and monasticism. Each of these themes is closely associated with the Bible, the first three especially with the opening chapters of the book of Genesis.

The study concludes that each of the themes examined has, in varying degree, affected Western man's attitude toward nature and his use of land. The last two themes, wilderness and monasticism, are found to have had the most dramatic and visible effects on the land itself.

A provocative 1967 magazine article by Lynn White, Jr., Professor of History at the University of California at Los Angeles, is also employed as a vehicle to assist in the examination of the influence of Western religious thought on man's attitude toward nature and

land. The article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," has as its thesis that Christianity is a major culprit in today's ecologic and environmental crisis. After reviewing the opinions of several individuals as to the validity of White's thesis, the present paper concludes that the latter is an oversimplification which at best possesses only a limited and partial validity.

White is correct in asserting that today's environmental crisis possesses an important religious dimension. Western man has been profoundly influenced by Christianity and has acted as if he rightfully had dominion over the rest of the created order and license to utilize nature in whatever way he pleases. He does exploit the environment.

White is in error, however, in attempting to place the major blame for the ecologic crisis on a Christian view of nature. There are significant causes of environmental pollution, both in the West and elsewhere, that have little or nothing to do with religious thought. Squandering of natural resources is not a recent development. From earliest times, and in all parts of the world, men have plundered nature and upset the ecological balance. Nor have Christian cultures had a monopoly on ecological damage, which in fact began long before Christianity and has continued throughout historical time. Other, non-Christian cultures have experienced--and are experiencing--the same environmental problems as the rest of the world.

The Bible does not provide warrant for an exploitative, man-centered theory of environment. While assigning man a unique role toward the rest of nature, it does not advocate dominion in the sense of destructive exploitation.

Some Aspects of Western Religious Thought  
and Man's Use of Land

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Judeo-Christian Theology: Selected Themes.....	4
	Dominion.....	6
	Stewardship.....	9
	<u>Contemptus Mundi</u> .....	13
	Comment.....	16
	Wilderness.....	20
	Monasticism and Monasteries.....	27
III.	Lynn White's Article.....	33
	Gabriel Fackre.....	37
	Lewis W. Moncrief.....	39
	Rene Dubos.....	41
	V. Elving Anderson.....	43
	Yi-Fu Tuan.....	45
	Summary.....	48
IV.	Summary and Conclusions.....	51
	Bibliographic Citations.....	54
	Bibliography.....	58
	Appendix.....	60

SOME ASPECTS OF WESTERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT  
AND MAN'S USE OF LAND

I. INTRODUCTION

The criticality of the environmental problem in this last third of the 20th century has been forcefully stated by René Dubos, the eminent microbiologist, teacher, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author:

Most societies seem willing to sacrifice environmental quality at the altar of economic wealth and political power. Wherever conditions are suitable for technological development, the earth is losing not only its ecological balance and pristine beauty, but also its fitness for biological and mental health. The deterioration of the earth is so rapid that environmentalists are now concerned less with fitness than with the social and biological dangers of modern life, in other words with the destructive aspects of the environmental problem. . . . The word 'environment' now evokes almost automatically pollution of air, food, and water; wastage of natural resources; exposure to excessive and abnormal stimuli; the desecration of natural and humanized landscapes; in brief, the thousand devils of the ecologic crisis.<sup>1</sup>

In December of 1966, Lynn White, Jr., Professor of History at the University of California at Los Angeles, presented a lecture before a Washington, D. C., meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The lecture, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," was published as an article in the 10 March 1967 issue of Science, the journal of the Association.<sup>2</sup> That article, in turn, has been reproduced in both learned and popular magazines and has become something of a classic. It has appeared in such magazines as Horizon, as well as in such offbeat publications as The Oracle, the now defunct journal of the counterculture in San Francisco.<sup>3</sup>

The essence of White's article is the following: (1) Concern

for the problem of ecologic backlash is mounting. (2) Christianity, the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen, not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. (3) Christianity is a major culprit in today's ecologic crisis. (4) Since the roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious. We must find a new religion, or rethink our old one.

The heart, or thesis, of White's article is stated in (3) above, namely that Christianity bears a great responsibility for today's ecologic crisis. He closes by proposing Saint Francis of Assisi as a patron saint for ecologists.<sup>4</sup>

The widespread republication of the article has aroused a great deal of interest and served to reopen dialogue on a long-standing question concerning Christianity's responsibility for Western man's alleged abuse of nature. "Whether valid or not," says Dubos, "White's thesis demands attention because it has become an article of faith for many conservationists, ecologists, economists, and even theologians."<sup>5</sup>

The present paper examines certain themes in Judeo-Christian thought and their implications for man's use of land, with the objective of discovering the influence of Western religion on attitudes toward nature and land. To that end, the paper also considers the validity of White's argument.

The principal Western religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Aside from occasional references to other religions, this paper deals only with Judeo-Christian thought. Islam is excluded to keep the scope within manageable limits. The word "Western" in the title has



been chosen over "Judeo-Christian" not only because it is shorter and more economical, but also because in general usage, "Western" refers to Christianity, the subject of major focus in this paper.

II. JUDEO-CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: SELECTED THEMES

In his classic work on nature and culture in Western thought, Traces on the Rhodian Shore, Clarence J. Glacken, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Geography at the University of California (Berkeley), writes:

Man is a created being. So is the earth in which he lives. Much of Christian thought, . . . is concerned with establishing connections between these two creations. . . .<sup>6</sup>

.....

. . . If we seek after the nature of God, we must consider the nature of man and the earth, and if we look at the earth, questions of divine purpose in its creation and of the role of mankind on it inevitably arise.<sup>7</sup>

The biblical story of creation bears directly upon the subject matter of this paper, as well as upon Lynn White's article. This chapter will deal with several relevant themes in Judeo-Christian thought, including the doctrine of creation as it relates to the dominion of man, stewardship, and other considerations.

The Bible contains two creation stories, Genesis Chapters 1 and 2. Some conservative Christians maintain that Genesis 2 is actually a continuation and elaboration of the account in the first chapter of Genesis and that there are no conflicts or contradictions between the two creation stories. According to critical biblical scholars, however, there are significant differences.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, Professor of Old Testament Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, says that creation in the broader sense is the concern of the narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:4a. The two creation stories supplement one another in interest, though they differ

Critical scholars generally agree that Genesis 2 (beginning at Genesis 2:4b) contains the earlier account. They attribute its authorship to Yahwistic (or Jahvistic) sources, from the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, and designated by the letter J in Bible exegesis. The creation story in Genesis 1-2:4a, then, is considered to have been written later. Its authorship is attributed to the so-called Priestly source, which is indicated by the letter P.<sup>b</sup>

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in many respects. Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 174.

<sup>b</sup>George W. Anderson, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies, University of Edinburgh, discusses the narrative sources of the Pentateuch according to modern biblical criticism in A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1959), pp. 19-56. See also Gerhard von Rad, Genesis - A Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 23-27.

## DOMINION

One of the most important ideas in Judeo-Christian theology is that of the dominion of man. This theme stems principally from the first creation story in Genesis 1, in particular from verses 27 and 28, the "image of God" and "dominion" verses. The idea of man's dominion over all other created things, however, also derives from Genesis 2 and other places in the Bible, the Psalms in particular.

Here, then, is the source of the anthropocentrism which White imputes to Christianity and which, he alleges, has played a major role in determining Western man's exploitative attitude toward nature and the environment. Such a man-centered interpretation of the doctrine of creation, says Frederick Elder, has been the dominant Christian interpretation throughout the centuries. He cites Ian McHarg:

The first chapter of Genesis contains the ruling concept of God, nature and man held by the Jews and Christians alike, man made in the image of God, given dominion over all life, enjoined to subdue the earth. It is from this source that Jews and Christians derive the concept of a man-oriented universe; the sense of the earth existing for the delectation [sic] and use of man, his relation to nature as one of domination and subjugation.<sup>8</sup>

In Genesis 1 God's creative work was progressive: the world of matter (Gen. 1:3-19), the system of life (Gen. 1:20-27). The first and second days saw the creation of inanimate things; the third day, vegetable life; the fourth day, stars (lights in the firmament of the heavens); the fifth day, sea animals and birds; the sixth day, land animals and man.

The living things which God created--sea monsters, fish, and

birds--were blessed: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (Gen. 1:22). God said to man also, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). This blessing, however, was accompanied by a restriction: man's food was to be confined to fruits and vegetables. He was to be a vegetarian, not a carnivore (Gen. 1:29-30).<sup>9</sup>

Commenting on the dignity which God has given to man, Rudolph Bultmann states that Genesis 1:26f. says that man was made in the image of God and that this originally was to imply that man had a physical likeness to God. In the text as it now stands, however, it means man's sovereignty over all other creatures. He refers to Psalm 8:

What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea (Ps. 8:4-8).<sup>10</sup>

Glacken points out that Psalm 104 presents man as central, though the latter seems at first sight to take so small a place, that Psalm 115:16 says: "The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men." Glacken also cites the Wisdom literature. In the wisdom of Solomon (Protestant Apocrypha), God made the world with his word and created man to rule "in holiness and righteousness. . . ." (9:3). Wisdom watched over Adam and gave him dominion over all else (10:1).<sup>11</sup>

Similar themes are also in Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of

Jesus Son of Sirach (Protestant Apocrypha), wherein the power of man over the whole of creation is reasserted as a divine plan for the birth, life-span, and death of man (17:1-3).

According to the Genesis flood narration (Gen. 6-9), when God destroyed the world he spared Noah and the animals which accompanied him. After the Flood, God blessed Noah and his sons as they left the Ark, (again) telling them to be fruitful and to multiply, to fill the earth, and to have dominion over all living things:

The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Gen. 9:2,3).

The significance of the theme of man's dominion in Judeo-Christian theology is summarized by Bernard Anderson in Understanding the Old Testament:

The theme of God's sovereignty over all his works comes to its highest expression in the account of the creation of man. By placing this act last, P shows that man is the crown of God's creation, the noblest of the creatures. As a result of a decision made in the Heavenly Council (see the 'us' and 'our' of 1:26), man was made 'in the image of God'--that is, he was to be a living representative of God's kingly rule on earth, just as the image of a king, set up in various provinces of an empire, is a visible token of the king's sway. Man's nobility, then, is that he is given a special task: to be God's representative, exercising dominion within the empire of his King.<sup>12</sup>

STEWARDSHIP

A second significant theme in Judeo-Christian theology is that of stewardship. Although the terms "steward" and "stewardship" are not common in the Bible, the concepts are widespread. The idea is closely allied to that of the dominion of man and likewise stems principally from the first two chapters of the Bible, especially from Genesis 2.

Concerning the theme of stewardship in Western thought, Glacken says:

The idea of stewardship has played an interesting role in the history of Christian thought toward other forms of life and even of inanimate nature; in recent years it has often been invoked in pleas for conservation and nature protection, Christian stewardship being closely linked with the responsibility that a temporary sojourner on earth has toward posterity.<sup>13</sup>

.....

The theme that man, sinful though he be, occupies a position on earth comparable to that of God in the universe, as a personal possession, a realm of stewardship, has been one of the key ideas in the religious and philosophical thought of Western civilization regarding man's place in nature.<sup>14</sup>

In the second (Yahwist or J) creation story, man's relationship to the earth is entirely different from that in the first. It begins with a reference to the desolate condition of the earth (Gen. 2:5,6). The earth, already in existence, lacks vegetation, for God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. Nor is there any man to till the ground.

The sequential order of creation is also markedly different from that of the P account in Genesis 1. It begins with man (created

from dust and made to live by God's breathing in his nostrils), rather than ending with him. Man is followed by plants (by divine planting in the Garden of Eden), animals (produced out of the ground by God), and woman (from the rib of Adam). There is no clear-cut division of time into days, as in Genesis 1.

The concept of stewardship relates closely to the Garden of Eden. Eden means "delight," a "garden of God," or divine park.<sup>15</sup> Verse 8 of Genesis 2 reads: "And the LORD GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed." And verse 15 reads: "The LORD GOD took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."

Commenting on verse 15, Gerhard von Rad, the German Old Testament scholar, writes:

. . . it indicates man's purpose in being in the garden: he is to work it and preserve it from all damage, a destiny that contrasts decidedly with the commonly accepted fantastic ideas of 'Paradise.'

. . . There is 'nothing here about abundant wonders of fertility and sensual enjoyment' . . . , but work was man's sober destiny even in his original state. That man was transferred to the garden to guard it indicates that he was called to a state of service and had to prove himself in a realm that was not his own possession . . . .<sup>16</sup>

And Glacken says concerning verse 15:

Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden 'to till it and keep it' (Gen. 2:15). Is there not here a hint that man is a caretaker of nature, that nature may be man's garden? The vocabulary of the myth is that of a peasant farmer; the plants are domesticated and the gardener of Eden tends them, perhaps removing the weeds, but he is a caretaker, not a farmer.<sup>17</sup>



The Deuteronomic Theology of the Land

Writing in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, H. N. Richardson, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Boston School of Theology, says that agricultural pursuits were so much a part of the life of the early Israelites that it seemed as though God had established them from the beginning as the superior way of life. Much of the Torah stems from and is related to the agricultural life, he notes, citing Genesis and Deuteronomy in particular.

The land was the gift of God and was under his care (Deut. 11:12). It was thought by some, not only that the farmer learned the techniques of good husbandry from God (Isa. 28:26), but also that Yahweh and only Yahweh had it in his power to order the natural forces in such a way as to assure the maximum results from man's labors.

. . . . .

. . . The three major festivals which, according to the Deuteronomist, the Israelite was required to observe in Jerusalem were strictly agricultural in nature; they were connected with the products of the earth. These in turn were the gifts of Yahweh, and therefore due reverence must be paid to him. Aside from the origin of these laws, they marked the beginning of the grain harvest, the end of that harvest, and the final ingathering of all the fruits of the year's labors.<sup>18</sup>

Richardson goes on to state that, of the 35 sections of the D Code, eight deal in whole or in part with matters concerning the agricultural life of the people. He mentions several examples, including the requirement to give a tithe of the seed, and the firstborn of the flock, to the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, elaborates on this theme in the journal Interpretation, in a 1969 article, "The Gift of

God, The Deuteronomic Theology of the Land." He points out the significance of the interrelation of God, land, and people in Deuteronomy, with land as primary motif.

The central theological affirmation about land, says Miller, is that it is the gift of God to Israel. Possession of land and life in it are a gift of salvation; loss of the land is prime punishment. Possession of land offers untold benefits and opportunities, but it also places demands upon the individual and corporate life of the people.

According to Miller, there are 18 references in Deuteronomy to Yahweh's promise of land to the patriarchs, all but three of which speak also of his giving it; the themes of gift and promise are tied. Yahweh has given the land; he only is lord or owner of it. Deuteronomy stipulates that even those who have been on the land for centuries have no claim on the land but receive it only as a gift of grace and may lose it if they fail to fulfill their responsibilities to Yahweh, a good part of which have to do with the use of land or their life on it.<sup>20</sup>

And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, gives you. . . . (Deut. 4:1)

He will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will also bless the fruit of your body and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the young of your flock, in the land which he swore to your fathers to give you (Deut. 7:13).

And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which thou, O LORD, hast given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God; . . . (Deut. 26:9,10)

CONTEMPTUS MUNDI

A third pertinent theme in Judeo-Christian theology has to do with a form of otherworldliness. This aspect of Christian thought can be categorized under the Latin words Contemptus Mundi, literally, contempt for the world. Glacken describes it as rejection of the earth as the dwelling place of man, a distaste for and disinterest in nature, opposition to natural theology, or the belief that one can find in the creation the handiwork of a reasonable, loving, and beneficent creator.<sup>21</sup> This theme stems from Genesis 2 and 3 and concerns the stories of Paradise and the Fall of Man.

The Dictionary of Comparative Religion states that the idea of a lost Golden Age figures in many religions, but that only in the Hebrew and Christian religions has it acquired theological significance.<sup>22</sup> On this subject Roderick Nash writes in his book Wilderness and the American Mind:

Almost all cultures had a conception of an earthly paradise. No matter where they were thought to be or what they were called, all paradises had in common a bountiful and beneficent setting in accord with the original meaning of the word in Persian--luxurious garden. A mild climate constantly prevailed. Ripe fruit drooped from every bough, and there were no thorns to prick reaching hands. The animals in paradise lived in harmony with man. Fear as well as want disappeared in this ideal state of nature.<sup>23</sup>

The story of the Fall of Man from his created state of blessed perfection in the Garden of Eden, is recounted in Genesis 3. In Christian thought through the centuries, the Fall is considered to have had a number of disastrous consequences, principal among them the entrance of sin into the world, separation from God and banishment from the

peace of the garden, and death. Other consequences attributed to the Fall include the pain of childbirth, the common fear and hatred of snakes, and a curse of the ground, with the consequent need thereafter for the laborious cultivation of agriculture.

Of particular importance to the theme of this paper is the significance of the Fall to the Christian idea of nature. The sequel to the doctrine of the Fall, says Glacken, was the infection and total corruption of nature. The story of the Fall is the source of the belief, widely held through the 17th century, that the Fall caused disorder in nature and a decline in its powers. The doctrine was important historically because it introduced the idea of toil as a consequence of sin. It was the source of the medieval contempt for and distrust of nature.<sup>24</sup>

Original Sin is defined as "a radical sin often held in Christian theology to be inherited by each person as a consequence of the original sinful choice made by Adam."<sup>25</sup> The doctrine of Original Sin is a first postulate of Christianity in the scheme of man's redemption by Christ. The first explicit statement of it is to be found in the New Testament in Romans 5:12ff. The spirit of Paul's statement here is that all mankind fell in Adam and entered into a state of perdition.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned--sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgressions of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come (Rom. 5:12-14).

This passage, according to Glacken, is essentially a commentary

on Genesis 3:17-18, which is the other important passage leading to a pessimistic view of man and nature, in which the Lord addresses the serpent, Eve, and Adam, in that order, giving punishment to each. To Adam the Lord said: "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen. 3:17). The earth, says Glacken, was an environment suited to the perfect man before the Fall and remained a fit environment for man after it, even if nature no longer possessed its previous perfection. Thistles and poisonous earth, for example, first came into being after the Fall.

The idea, derived from Genesis 3, that the fall of man had also caused a deterioration in nature influenced conceptions of the nature of the earth, at least until the end of the 17th century. This deterioration and the toil required after the Fall to induce productivity in the soil were the counterpart in the physical world of evil in the moral world.<sup>27</sup>

## COMMENT

Research on, and consideration of, the preceding three themes in Judeo-Christian theology indicates that the following points merit special comment.

There are distinct differences between the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. The stories vary not only in style of writing but also in substance, such as the diverse sequential order of creation in the two. The stress in Genesis 2 is on the earth and man; it is more anthropocentric than Genesis 1, which is considered theocentric, according to critical biblical scholars. In Genesis 1, God, not man, is the center of focus.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of the dominion of man does not stem solely from Genesis 1 (specifically from Genesis 1:26-28), as it is often represented to do. An equally good case can be made (and is made by some critical biblical scholars) for Genesis 2. This rationale is based on man's being created first, not last (as in Genesis 1), thus making him the "first order of creation" and giving him priority rights over the rest of the created order. It is further based on man's naming all of the other living creatures, since naming was perceived in Hebrew psychology as virtually a creative activity. Moreover, to name was to exert power over.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of man's vocation to exercise dominion is also stressed by its repetition in the Flood narrative (Gen. 9). At the same time the vegetarian restriction imposed in Genesis 1 is lifted.

In Genesis 1 God created all things equally good--animate and inanimate things alike--and God called the earth good even before

man was present. Six different times (verses 4,10,12,18,21,25) God called the things which he had created "good" and the total created order "very good," in verse 31 at the end of the chapter. Furthermore, in Genesis 1 all living things which God had created--not just man--were blessed and told to be fruitful and to multiply.

In Genesis 1, vegetation was created only indirectly by God; his creative command was directed to the earth. "And God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth. . . . The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed . . . ." (Gen. 1:11-12)

Genesis 2, by contrast, contains no account of creation of vegetation as such. Verse 8 speaks of God's planting a garden in Eden, and verse 9 tells of trees which God directly makes to grow: "And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

The Bible contains the expression "in his own image" in the first creation story (Gen. 1:27): "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." The creation stories, however, do not contain these frequently-used references to man: "crown of creation;" "center of the universe;" "noblest of the creatures;" "climax of God's work;" "center of creation;" "lord of (the) creation;" "lord of the earth;" "God's representative on earth;" "vice-regent of God on earth." All of the latter common expressions are subsequent constructs of exegetical literature and

theological writing and speaking.

The story of Paradise and the Fall is presented very differently by modern critical biblical scholars and by conservative, more orthodox scholars. Bernard W. Anderson, for example, says in writing of the Paradise story and the consequences of the Fall:

Taken by itself, the story is filled with images--like the Tree of Life and the cunning serpent--which are found in ancient folklore. Indeed, the story evidently once circulated as the storyteller's answer to several questions: Why are man and woman attracted to each other? Why does social propriety demand the wearing of clothes? Why must there be the pain of childbirth and the misery of hard work? Why is the serpent hated by men? These, and other questions, were answered in the story that bears even yet the marks of an ancient popular tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Gerhard von Rad says in his book Genesis - A Commentary:

To decide about the literary form of the story of Paradise and the Fall is very difficult. It is in this respect something unique. Ever since the victorious campaign of the science of the history of religions it has been clear that Gen., chs. 2 f., even though a direct Babylonian or other corresponding parallel has not been found, must be considered in connection with common Oriental myths of man's creation, the mountain of the gods, the tree of life, the water of life, cherubim, etc.<sup>31</sup>

In sharp contrast is the comment by Henry H. Halley in Halley's Bible Handbook - An Abbreviated Bible Commentary:

The Fall of Man - It was effected through the subtlety of the Serpent. The Serpent is represented as speaking as of himself. But later Scripture indicates that it was Satan speaking through the Serpent (II Cor. 11:3,14; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). . . . The dreadful work was done. And the pall of Sin and Gloom and Toil and Pain and Death fell upon a world which God had made beautiful.

.....

Effect of Sin on Nature - Here, in the opening pages of the Bible, we have a primeval explanation of Nature as it is today: common Hatred of Snakes (3:14,15); Pain in Childbirth (3:15); and



the earth's Spontaneous Production of Useless Weeds, while food-bearing vegetation has to be Toilsomely Cultivated (3:17-19). . . .<sup>32</sup>

An appendix to this paper contains a short excerpt in Spanish (with translation by this writer) taken from a Spanish encyclopedia published in Madrid in 1924. That excerpt presents the orthodox (Roman Catholic) Church view (of that time at least) of the authenticity and historicity of the book of Genesis, and particularly of the first chapters, which are of special importance to the theme of this paper.

## WILDERNESS

The concept of wilderness occupies a unique place in Judeo-Christian theology. It has long played a significant role in Western thought and continues to do so even today. From the beginning wilderness has posed a kind of contradiction to the idea that God had planned creation for man's benefit.

In the introduction to his book Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought, George H. Williams of the Harvard Divinity School, identifies certain positive and negative interpretations which have been placed on the wilderness or desert. In a positive sense, he says, wilderness means variously a place of protection; a place of contemplative retreat, as in one's inner nature or ground of being; and as the ground itself of the divine being. In a negative sense, wilderness means the world of the unredeemed, the wasteland, and the realm or phase of punitive or purgative preparation for salvation.<sup>33</sup>

Further on, Williams lists three meanings of wilderness as found in the Old Testament: (1) The desert as the realm of demons and death (2) The desert as the place of the covenant (3) The desert as the place of refuge, purgation, and consecration. These three meanings, he says, yield four concepts or motifs which recur in various combinations throughout post-biblical history: (a) wilderness as moral waste but potential paradise (b) wilderness as a place of testing or punishment (c) wilderness as the experience of nuptial (covenantal) bliss (d) wilderness as a place of refuge (protection) or contemplation (renewal).<sup>34</sup>

Describing the importance of the concept of wilderness in Western thought, Roderick Nash says that wilderness has been "instinctively understood as something alien to man--an insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization had waged an unceasing struggle." As fact and symbol wilderness permeated the Judeo-Christian tradition. Anyone with a Bible, according to Nash, had at hand an extended lesson in the meaning of wild land.<sup>35</sup>

The ancient Hebrews regarded the wilderness as a cursed land. To distinguish it from "good" land which supported crops, they used a number of terms which have been translated "wilderness." Nash notes that the term occurs several hundred times in the Old Testament (RSV), as well as many times in the New. Drought and the resulting wilderness were considered as a curse dispensed by God to show his displeasure. When the Lord saw fit to punish or to threaten a sinful people, he used wilderness as a potent weapon:

I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools . . . I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it (Deut. 42:15, 5:6).<sup>36</sup>

God's approval, conversely, meant an abundance of life-giving water. (The climate and geography of the Near East made the baptismal rite an especially meaningful ceremony.) To express his pleasure and to manifest his care, the greatest blessing that the Lord could bestow was to give water in the desert and to transform wilderness into "good" land. "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys

and hills, . . . and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you" (Deut. 8:7,10). In the famous redemption passage in Isaiah, God promises that "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing" (Isa. 35: 1,2).<sup>37</sup>

The ambivalent attitude of the ancient Hebrews toward wilderness is recounted several places in the Old Testament. The Exodus experience established a tradition of going to the wilderness for purification and simplicity. After the Exodus the Jews under Moses wandered in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years. It was in the wilderness that Elijah met God after seeking inspiration and guidance a symbolic 40 days.<sup>38</sup>

Moses received the Ten Commandments in the heart of the wilderness on Mount Sinai. If the Israelites remained faithful to the covenant, the Lord promised them escape from the wilderness and the promised land of milk and honey. Nash says that the Israelites' experience in 40 years of wandering gave wilderness several meanings: a sanctuary from sinful and persecuting society; an environment in which to find and draw close to God; a testing ground where a chosen people were purged, humbled, and made ready for the land of promise.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of wilderness as a sanctuary was perpetuated in Christianity. Nash calls John the Baptist the New Testament counterpart of Moses, Elijah, and the apocalyptic Hebrew Essene community. He sought the wild valleys of the Jordan River to make ready for the Messiah. Each one of the Gospels, says Nash, connected John with the

prophet mentioned in Isaiah whose voice could be heard "crying in the wilderness" to prepare God's way. When Jesus went to John in the Judean Desert for baptism, the prophecy was fulfilled. Immediately afterward Christ "was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1).<sup>40</sup>

Speaking about attitudes toward wilderness in early and medieval Christianity, Nash states that wilderness retained its significance "as the earthly realm of the powers of evil that the Church had to overcome. Christians judged their work to be successful when they cleared away the wild forests and cut down the sacred groves where pagans held their rites." He goes on to say:

In a more figurative sense, wilderness represented the Christian conception of the situation man faced on earth. It was a compound of his natural inclination to sin, the temptation of the material world, and the forces of evil themselves. In this worldly chaos he wandered lost and forlorn, grasping at Christianity in the hope of delivery to the promised land that now was located in heaven.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, Christianity retained the concept of wilderness as a place of refuge, contemplation, and consecration. From early times, a succession of Christian hermits and monks sought the solitude of the wilderness for meditation and spiritual renewal. This concept will be examined more fully in the next section of this chapter, dealing with monasticism.

Writing about the Christian Middle Ages, Nash says that "the belief that good Christians should maintain an aloofness from the pleasures of the world also was a factor in determining attitudes toward wilderness."

For a Christian of the Middle Ages, the ideal focus was attainment of heavenly beatitudes, not enjoyment of his present situation. Such a point of view tended to check appreciation of natural beauty. Thus during the Renaissance, Christianity offered considerable resistance to the development of joy in perceiving wild landscapes.<sup>42</sup>

Turning to more recent times and to the New World, Nash states that "Wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization." "Yet for most of their history," he continues, "Americans regarded wilderness as a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and fructification in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity."<sup>43</sup>

Settlement of the New World offered an abundant opportunity for expression of the bias against wilderness which Western thought had generated. Nash observes that much of the New World was wilderness in fact, but that it was also wilderness because Europeans considered it such. "The Judeo-Christian tradition," he says, "constituted a powerful formative influence on the attitude toward wilderness of the Europeans who discovered and colonized the New World."<sup>44</sup> On this same theme, Williams writes:

When the emigrants from the eastern seaboard of America moved into the West, they passed through a real wilderness haunted by wolves and savages, but the millennial tutelage of Scripture had charged that wilderness with epic significance and theological meaning. The wilderness had become, in fact, a complex symbol of significance both for the corporate and for the personal expressions of the Christian life.

As in the history of America, so in the much longer history of ancient Israel, upon which, through their Bible, the American settlers and pioneers were drawing for inspiration and guidance, the wilderness as desert in its geophysical sense was continuously surcharged with the added meanings provided by the religious experience of the race.<sup>45</sup>

According to Nash, two components figured in the American pioneer's bias against wilderness. In the first place, the wilderness constituted a threat to his very survival. Safety and comfort, even food and shelter, depended on overcoming the wild environment. The darkness of the forests hid savage Indians, wild beasts, and unknown, terrifying creatures of the imagination. The pioneer, in short, says Nash, lived too close to wilderness for appreciation; his attitude was hostile and his criteria utilitarian. The conquest of wilderness was his major concern. Civilized man, in addition, faced the danger of succumbing to the wilderness and reverting to savagery himself.<sup>46</sup>

Not only did wilderness frustrate the pioneers physically, but it also acquired significance as a sinister symbol. The pioneers shared the Western tradition of considering wild country as a cursed wasteland, a moral vacuum. Frontiersmen, says Nash, sensed that they battled wild country not only for personal survival, but also in the name of nation, race, and God. "Civilizing the New World meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into good." Wilderness was the villain, the pioneer, the hero.

It followed from the pioneer's association of wilderness with hardship and danger in a variety of forms, that the rural, controlled, state of nature was the object of his affection and goal of his labor. The pastoral condition seemed closest to paradise and the life of ease and contentment. Americans hardly needed reminding that Eden had been a garden. The rural was also the fruitful and as such satisfied the frontiersman's utilitarian instincts. On both idyllic and practical counts wilderness was anathema.

Transforming the wild into the rural had Scriptural precedents which the New England pioneers knew well. Genesis 1:28, the first commandment of God to man, stated that mankind should increase, conquer the earth, and have dominion over all living things. This made the fate of wilderness plain. . . . Wilderness was waste; the proper behavior toward it, exploitation.<sup>47</sup>

Discovery of the New World reawakened traditional European notions of an earthly paradise lying somewhere to the west. According to Nash, reports of early explorers filtering back to the Old World led to the belief that America might be the place dreamed of since antiquity. This paradise myth of a second Eden, says Nash, "quickly shattered against the reality of North America. Soon after he arrived the 17th century frontiersman realized that the New World was the antipode of paradise. Previous hopes intensified the disappointment."<sup>48</sup>

Notwithstanding the disappointment and disillusionment of many hopeful colonists, America continued to attract hundreds of thousands--and eventually millions--to a land of promise and opportunity. Williams says: "A nation made up of peoples fleeing in successive generations from the bondage of the Old World across the Atlantic Ocean . . . has been seen as a providential repetition . . . of the exodus of God's ancient elect from bondage to Egypt."<sup>49</sup>

The immigrants comprised many and varied people, including such religiously-motivated groups as the Pilgrims and Puritans, German sectarians, Quakers, and Swedenborgians. Nash says that wilderness became a favorite metaphor for discussing the Christian situation, a symbol of anarchy and evil to which the Christian was unalterably opposed.

Although the Puritans and their predecessors in perfectionism often fled to the wilderness from a corrupt society, they did not look on wilderness itself as their goal. Their driving impulse was to carve a garden in the wild, to make an island of spiritual light in the darkness. "Their Bibles," says Nash, "contained all they needed to know in order to hate wilderness."<sup>50</sup>



## MONASTICISM AND MONASTERIES

The final subject to be considered within this chapter on Judeo-Christian theology is that of monasticism, which is defined as a state of life in retirement from the world adopted for motives of religion. Monasticism is not peculiar to Christianity, for in many religions essentially the same motives have led men (and women) to withdraw themselves wholly or in part from worldly society and to seek in seclusion a purer and higher life. Monasticism has had a powerful influence in Christianity and continues to play a significant role even today. For the purposes of this paper, this theme is closely related to the preceding one of wilderness.

Employing the Encyclopedia Americana as reference, a few salient points of the history of monasticism are summarized following.

In Old Testament times the Essenes, Nazarites, and other groups specially consecrated to God separated themselves from society to a greater or lesser degree and in this respect were the precursors of the earliest Christian ascetics. In the middle of the 3rd century A.D., during the persecution of Christians, Paul of Thebes (St. Paul the first hermit) withdrew to a wilderness and lived the remainder of his life in absolute solitude. Many others, fleeing from persecution or from a profoundly corrupt society, flocked to the wilderness of the Nile country. By the middle of the 4th century, there were 7,000 or more monks.

From Egypt, monasticism, or monachism, soon spread into Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Armenia. It was first

introduced into the West shortly after the middle of the 4th century, when a few small communities of monks were founded at Rome and in northern Italy. Monastic establishments multiplied rapidly in the West. Early in the 6th century Benedict of Nursia began a reform of Latin monachism which, variously amended and modified, has been the law of the monastic life of Western Europe ever since. Besides monasteries for men, Benedict also instituted monasteries for women.

The beginning of the 12th century saw the rise of the knightly orders, the members of which, besides the usual three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, took a fourth vow of making war on the infidels for the defense of Christendom. History records the titles of over 90 military orders or of bodies so styling themselves.

By the beginning of the 13th century there seemed to be a sufficiency of religious orders to satisfy all needs. Very soon, however, two new orders were instituted, in spite of a papal decree forbidding the creation of new monastic orders. These two, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, constitute the mendicant orders. The Company of Jesus (Jesuits) was the latest of the great religious orders. It was founded in 1534.

In spite of great hostility to monasticism during the Reformation, and notwithstanding hampering restrictions and some expulsions for political and economic reasons at various times and places, monasticism is generally flourishing without restriction in the West today.<sup>51</sup>

Toward the close of the preceding section it was noted that, notwithstanding the general Judeo-Christian antagonism toward wilderness, Christianity in the Middle Ages retained the idea that wild country could be a place of refuge and religious purity. The tradition of fleeing into uninhabited country to obtain freedom of worship persisted strongly into the Middle Ages. Nash writes:

A succession of Christian hermits and monks (literally one who lives alone) found the solitude of the wilderness conducive to meditation, spiritual insight, and moral perfection. . . . Monasticism flourished, and numerous zealots sought solitary retreats. It was the place in which they hoped to ignite the flame that would eventually transform all wilderness into a godly paradise.<sup>52</sup>

Monastic organizations created great estates in remote and desolate places and made a lasting contribution to the Christian landscape, especially in Europe during the Middle Ages. They engaged in a variety of activities directly affecting the land: construction of monasteries and outlying buildings; planting of beautiful gardens; clearing of wooded land and creation of arable; drainage of swamps and marshes; irrigation, canal building, and diking; farming and livestock grazing. Describing monastery siting, Glacken writes:

There is a constant striving to see correspondences between natural beauty and biblical texts, and for symbolism, as in the selection of a cloister site shaped like the Greek capital delta, because it symbolized the trinity, to describe paradise as an ideal landscape. . . . Although many were placed on uninviting land such as swamps and dense forests, sites were often chosen for their beauty: the cloister gardens in the beautifully sited places were considered miniature pictures of the glories of creation.<sup>53</sup>

Of the monastic orders, of greatest importance for the purposes of this paper are the Benedictines and the Franciscans. The better

known order for manual labor, in fact perhaps the best known order for labor, is the Benedictines. When Benedict established his monastery on Monte Cassino in the 6th century, he made it a rule that all monks should work with their hands in the fields and shops. His philosophy is expressed by one aspect of the Benedictine rule prevailing even today: To labor is to pray. The most frequently quoted chapter of the rule, according to Glacken, is the forty-eighth, which begins, "idleness is the enemy of the soul. The brethren, therefore, must be occupied at stated hours in manual labor, and again at other hours in sacred reading."<sup>54</sup>

René Dubos points out that Benedictine monks have consistently intervened in nature and have effected profound transformations of soil, water, fauna, and flora. Their management of nature, he says, has in most cases proved compatible with the maintenance of environmental quality. One branch of the Benedictine order, the Cistercians, sought out valleys to establish their monasteries, whereas the original Benedictines generally settled on the hills. The Cistercians consequently played a role of great social importance. With lay helpers they cleared wooded river valleys and drained marshy land, creating healthful and prosperous farmlands out of the malarious wilderness.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the contributions of the Benedictines are summed up in this passage from the Encyclopedia Americana:

The Benedictine order was for a long time a powerful agency in the civilization and christianization of the barbarian nations of Europe. Wherever a Benedictine foundation was made there the face of the country was quickly changed: forests were cleared, marshes drained, the arts of husbandry developed, peace and civil order maintained, science and learning fostered, schools, hospitals and refuges established.<sup>56</sup>

The famed Franciscan order was founded in the 13th century by Saint Francis of Assisi. The three principal orders constituting the Franciscans were all founded on a basis of absolute poverty and of service to the (Catholic) Church, labor, doing good, and preaching. From its very beginnings, the Franciscan order experienced a phenomenal growth, notwithstanding division which developed within the order not long after Francis' rather early death.

The order was brought to the New World with Columbus and has played a major role in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. The Franciscans have taken an active and leading part in the study of Holy Scripture and in all branches of secular and sacred learning in much of the world. They have been instrumental in the establishment of a great number of schools, missions, and churches.<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned before, Lynn White proposes Saint Francis as a patron saint for ecologists.<sup>58</sup> Entirely aside from that, however, Francis merits consideration in this paper because of his remarkable attitude toward nature and non-human life.

An Italian by birth, St. Francis is believed to have been born in 1182; he died in 1226. Although the founder of one of the largest and most influential Christian religious orders, he himself was never a priest. He is famed for the beauty, simplicity, and amiability of his character and his love of created nature. The visions and miracles attributed to him are bewildering in number and character. From a fairly early age he voluntarily lived by his own labor and by begging, in extreme poverty, without personal possessions and dependent upon alms for the barest necessities.

Francis preached and practiced an absolute identification with nature and treated all living things--even all created things--as his brothers and sisters, equally dependent upon the heavenly Father. This romantic and reverent, but unworldly, attitude in the face of nature, caused some of his contemporaries to consider him mad.

With great love he would preach to flowers, cornfields, vineyards, stones, woods, waters, gardens, earth, fire, air, wind, snow--all of the beauties of creation. He spoke to birds and animals as if they were human, scolding them when they needed to be scolded, telling them their duties toward God and what they should do to observe his commands. To Francis all creatures were important because they provide a trace of God and confirm the work of God. Non-human life has its own dignity, existing for its own purposes and in its own right.<sup>c</sup>

Nash presents a succinct picture of Francis in the following paragraph from Wilderness and the American Mind:

Among medieval Christians St. Francis of Assisi is the exception that proves the rule. He stood alone in a posture of humility and respect before the natural world. Assuming that birds, wolves, and other creatures had souls, St. Francis preached to them as equals. This challenge to the idea of man as above, rather than of, the natural world might have altered the prevailing conception of wilderness. But the Church stamped St. Francis' beliefs as heretical. Christianity had too much at stake in the notion that God set man apart from and gave him dominance over the rest of nature (Genesis 1:28) to surrender it easily.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>c</sup>This sketch of St. Francis contains information gleaned from a number of sources, namely: Encyclopedia Americana, 1955 edition; Dubos, pp. 161-162; Glacken, pp. 214-216; Williams, pp. 59-62; John K. Wright, Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades (New York: American Geographical Society, 1925), p. 235ff.

### III. LYNN WHITE'S ARTICLE

At the beginning of this paper the essence of Lynn White's provocative article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" was presented in four points. The heart, or thesis, of the article was summarized in the statement that Christianity is a major culprit in today's ecologic crisis. The article is now more completely analyzed to facilitate consideration of the validity of White's thesis in light of the foregoing discussion of certain aspects of Western religious thought.

The following-listed points have been extracted from White's article in the order in which they appear:

(1) Ever since man became a numerous species he has affected his environment notably. Quite unintentionally, changes in human ways often affect non-human nature.

(2) Concern for the problem of ecologic backlash is mounting.

(3) Our ecologic crisis is the product of an emerging, entirely novel, democratic culture.

(4) Both modern technology and modern science are distinctly Occidental; successful technology is also Western.

(5) The distinctive Western tradition of science began in the late 11th century. By the late 13th century Europe had seized global scientific leadership from Islam.

(6) According to prevailing medieval Christian belief, man and nature are two things, and man is master.

(7) Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is, by religion.

(8) Our daily habits of action are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress, which is rooted in, and indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology.

(9) We continue to live today very largely in a context of Christian axioms.

(10) In the Judeo-Christian creation story, God planned everything for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose other than to serve man's purposes.

(11) Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen, especially in its Western form.

(12) According to Christianity, man shares in great measure God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.

(13) By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. Under Christianity, 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.

(14) Modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology. The dynamism of religious devotion, shaped by the Judeo-Christian dogma of creation, gave it impetus.

(15) Somewhat over a century ago, science and technology joined to give mankind powers which are out of control. Christianity



bears a huge burden of the guilt.

(16) It is doubtful that disastrous ecologic backlash can be avoided by applying more science and more technology to our problems.

(17) Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature. We (Christians) are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, and willing to use it for our slightest whim.

(18) What we do about ecology depends on our idea of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.

(19) St. Francis of Assisi was the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ. He tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures.

(20) No new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity. Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.

(21) St. Francis proposed an alternative Christian view of nature and man's relation to it. He tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation, but he failed.

(22) Both our present science and technology are so tainted with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone.

(23) Since the roots of our troubles are so largely religious,

the remedy must also be essentially religious. We must rethink and re-feel our nature and destiny.

(24) The religious, but heretical, sense of the Franciscans for the spiritual autonomy of all parts of nature may point a direction.

"I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists."<sup>d</sup>

As stated at the beginning of this paper, not only has White's article been widely republished since its appearance in March of 1967, but a bevy of argument and counter-argument has ensued. From the abundance of authoritative opinion available, the comments of several writers have been selected and are reviewed immediately following. Salient observations of each writer are extracted or summarized.

<sup>d</sup>Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Science, 155 (1967), 1203-1207.

Gabriel Fackre, writing a selection "Ecology and Theology," in Western Man and Environmental Ethics, 1973, propounds the biblical theme of responsible stewardship. The ecological problem, he says, is a theological problem.

Fackre begins by agreeing with White in part. White, he says, is correct in stating that the biblical story places man above nature. Man is the crown of creation and made in the very image of God. The Old Testament premise is confirmed in the New. The doctrine of creation had a twin development. On one hand it served to refute the divinizing and romanticizing of nature. But, on the other, it fought the degradation of nature.

The early Christian church rejected gnostic dualism, which looked on the world of matter as inferior. Notwithstanding strong notes of otherworldliness and world-denial in medieval Western thought, these had their origins more in Hellenistic ideas than in biblical ones. The present Apostles' Creed asserts that the world was made by God himself and enjoys a divine dignity. "As someone put it, 'God invented matter, therefore he must like it.'"

The Genesis affirmation of the earth is repeated in biblical passages such as the Psalms, which affirm the intrinsic worth, beauty, and order of the natural environment. The biblical love of neighbor also extends to our neighbor the earth, as St. Francis so clearly understood. To defend the dignity of man does not mean one has to denigrate the earth. Responsible Christian participation in the struggle against pollution requires rediscovery of the forgotten aspects of the doctrine of creation, the respect for and rapport with nature. The

Judeo-Christian tradition affirms, in the case of both man and nature, a derived dignity, and accords each a respect commensurate with its source in God.

To the extent that the Christian community has contributed to the bleak prospect rather than a promising one, we need a fresh penitence, a reformation of our bad theology, and zealous action toward shalom (peace).<sup>60</sup>

Gabriel Fackre is Professor of Theology at Andover Newton Theological Seminary.

Lewis W. Moncrief, in a selection "The Cultural Basis of Our Environmental Crisis," in Western Man and Environmental Ethics, 1973, discusses private ownership of resources, the motive of commercial profit, and the development of technology and urbanization as the more immediate causes of the environmental crisis. These factors, he claims, are only indirectly related to the Judeo-Christian tradition and are found in other cultures today.

In the West two significant revolutions occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries which completely redirected its political, social, and economic destiny. These were the French and the Industrial Revolutions. Until very recently these two types of revolution were unique to the West. With integration of democratic and technological ideals, increasing wealth began to be distributed more equitably among the population. With increasing population, increasing production, increasing urban concentrations, and increasing real incomes for well over a hundred years, the environment has taken a terrible beating.

The forces of democracy, technology, urbanization, increasing real individual wealth, and an aggressive attitude toward nature appear to be directly related to the environmental crisis in the Western world. Although the Judeo-Christian tradition has probably influenced the character of each of these forces, there is little historical or scientific basis to isolate religious tradition as a cultural component and to contend that it is the "historical root of our ecological crisis."

To assert that Judeo-Christian teaching is the primary cultural condition that has created our environmental crisis, avoids

several hard questions:

(1) Is there less tendency for those who control the resources in non-Christian cultures to live in extravagant affluence, with attendant high levels of waste and inefficient consumption?

(2) If non-Judeo-Christian cultures had the same levels of economic productivity, urbanization, and high average household incomes, is there evidence to indicate that these cultures would not exploit or disregard nature as our culture does?

(3) If our environmental crisis is a "religious problem," why are other parts of the world experiencing in various degrees the same environmental problems that we are so well acquainted with in the Western world?

All White can defensibly argue is that the West developed modern science and technology first. This says nothing about the origin or existence of a particular ethic toward our environment.<sup>61</sup>

Lewis W. Moncrief teaches in the Department of Park and Recreation Resources at Michigan State University.

René Dubos, in A God Within, 1972, and in a selection "A Theology of Earth," in Western Man and Environmental Ethics, 1973, indicates that in ancient civilizations, Chinese, Greek, and Western, there was deforestation, over-grazing, and disastrous soil erosion. Christian cultures, he says, neither past nor present, have had a monopoly on ecological damage.

The theory that Judeo-Christian attitudes toward nature are responsible for the development of technology and for the ecological crisis represents a historical half-truth. The process of erosion of land, destruction of animal and plant species, and excessive exploitation of natural resources began some ten thousand years ago, long before the Bible was written.

The record shows that a dramatic extinction of several species of large mammals and terrestrial birds occurred at the very beginning of the Neolithic period, coincident with the expansion of agricultural man. This destructive process has continued throughout historical time in many parts of the world. Erosion resulting from human activities such as deforestation and over-grazing has had disastrous effects since ancient times. Early men, aided especially by that most useful and most noxious of all animals, the Mediterranean goat, were probably responsible for more deforestation and erosion than all the bulldozers of the Judeo-Christian world.

There is no reason to believe that Oriental civilizations have been more respectful of nature than Judeo-Christian civilizations. The Chinese attitude of respect for nature, in fact, probably arose as a response to the damage done in antiquity. The progressive destruction

of the groves of cedars and cypresses of Lebanon is one of the best-documented examples of ecological mismanagement in the ancient world.

At all times in the past and all over the world, men have plundered nature and upset the ecological equilibrium. This was usually done out of ignorance, but also because man has always been more concerned with immediate advantages than with long-range goals. Furthermore, ecological disasters could not be foreseen, nor was there a real choice of alternatives.

If men are more destructive now than they were in the past, it is because there are more of them and because they have at their command more powerful means of destruction, not because they have been influenced by the Bible.

The Benedictine rule seems to be inspired from the second chapter of Genesis, in which the Lord placed man in the Garden of Eden not as master but as steward. The Benedictine rule, furthermore, implies ecological concepts which are much more in tune with the needs of the modern world than is the worshipful attitude of St. Francis. St. Benedict is much more relevant than is St. Francis to human life in the modern world, and to the human condition in general.<sup>62</sup>

René Dubos, professor emeritus at the Rockefeller University, is a microbiologist and experimental pathologist.



V. Elving Anderson, writing in Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics, 1973, agrees with White that the ecologic problem does in fact have an important religious component. He says that it is seriously misleading, however, to place the entire blame on a Christian view of nature. The squandering of natural resources is not a recent development. Environmental crises have arisen in all highly technological societies, no matter what the dominant religion.

Among the causes of environmental pollution are population growth, affluence, and the misuse of technology. All three have important moral and ethical implications. Technological solutions will not be sufficient, however, since changes in attitudes and values are required. We need a new understanding of God as Creator and of man as steward.

Theology has focused on human nature and has generally disregarded the world of nature. Interest in the doctrine of creation too often has been limited to the problem of origins, thus obscuring the view of God as both Creator and Sustainer. God's provision for all forms of life is clear in Psalm 104. God's covenant with Noah included every living creature.

The view of God as Creator will prevent the nature worship that could otherwise characterize the environmental movement. Understanding that the earth is the Lord's encourages respect for nature without the temptation to worship it.

Although man is a part of God's creative work, God has given him a unique role toward the rest of nature. Dominion does not mean exploitation. The command in Genesis 1 to subdue and have dominion is

balanced by the instruction in Genesis 2 to dress and keep the land.<sup>63</sup>

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Yi-Fu Tuan, in an article "Our Treatment of the Environment in Ideal and Actuality," in the American Scientist for May-June 1970, observes man's effect on nature in China and in the pagan and Christian West.

Because of a romantic idea stemming back to late 17th and early 18th century Europe, sensitive Westerners even today are prone to contrast their aggressive, exploitative attitude toward nature with the harmonious relationships of other times and places. This view, although commendable for generosity, fails to recognize inconsistency and paradox as characteristic of human existence.

Two ideas bearing on our relationships to environment have been receiving greater recognition in recent years. The first is that the balances of nature can be upset by people with the most primitive tools, the second that a wide gap may exist between a culture's ideals and their expression in the real world. The gaps that exist between an expressed attitude toward environment and actual practice may be taken as one sign of maladjustment in society.

There is some truth to the generalization that the European sees nature as subordinate to man, whereas the Chinese sees himself as part of nature. It cannot, however, be pressed too far. In actuality, in the play of forces that govern the world, esthetic and religious ideals rarely have a major role.

There is a view that Christianity constituted a great divide and that the triumph of Christ over the pagan deities brought a revolutionary change in attitudes toward society and nature. The fact is that at the level of the actual impress of man on environment, both

constructive and destructive, the pagan world had as much to show as Christianized Europe did, until the beginning of the modern period. Against the vast transformations of nature in the pagan world, incursions in the early centuries of the Christian era appear relatively modest.

Turning to China, there are discrepancies between esthetic ideals and performance, as well as unforeseen conflicts and dysfunctions inevitable in a complex civilization. Ancient Chinese literature contains evidence that the need to regulate use of resources was recognized and that an old tradition of forest care existed. At the same time, it is clear that the concern arose in response to damage that had already occurred, even in antiquity.

Vast deforestation and acute soil erosion have taken place in areas that were once well wooded. The reasons were many and varied: population increase, with more and more land taken over by farmers; excessive burning of trees for various purposes; depletion of forests for industrial and home fuel; construction and reconstruction of old Chinese cities; even the reduction of pine forests for soot to make black ink for writing; heavy consumption of wood in cremation of the dead in accordance with Buddhist practice; destructive over-grazing by sheep and goats, particularly in Mongolia.

As late as the 9th century, large areas of land in the North, today treeless, were well wooded. The new Communist government is making an immense effort to control erosion and to reforest. For those who admire the old culture, it must again seem irony that the "mist of green" is no reflection on the traditional virtues of Taoism and Buddhism; on the contrary, it rests on their explicit denial. The

unplanned and often careless use of land in China belongs, one hopes,  
to the past.<sup>64</sup>

## SUMMARY

The following-listed salient ideas emerge from the preceding extracts of selected authoritative comment on White's article:

Today's ecologic crisis does have an important religious component. The biblical story of creation (specifically Genesis 1) states that man is made in the image of God and given dominion over the rest of the created order. It places man apart from, and above, nature.

Western man, profoundly influenced by Christianity, has acted as if he has been given some right to utilize his environment in whatever way he pleases. He does exploit the environment.

There is an absence in Christian theology of a serious consideration of the relation between man and his natural setting. Christian thought has shown a tendency to deal with man at the expense of developing sensitivities toward nature. That is to say, theology in the West has focused on human nature and not on nature.

It is seriously misleading to place the entire blame for the environmental crisis on a Christian view of nature. There are important causes of environmental pollution, both in the West and elsewhere, that have little or nothing to do with religious thought. Among these are population growth, the impact of democracy, private ownership of resources, the motive of commercial profit, development and misuse of technology, increasing individual and national affluence, urbanization, and a generally aggressive attitude toward nature.

The squandering of natural resources is not a recent thing.

At all times in the past, and all over the world, men have plundered nature and upset the ecological balance. People with the most primitive of tools can upset the balance of nature.

Christian cultures, past or present, have had no monopoly on ecological damage. The processes of erosion of land, destruction of animal and plant species, and exploitation of natural resources began long before Christianity. They have continued throughout historical time in many parts of the world. Environmental crises have arisen in all highly technological societies, no matter what the dominant religion. If men are more destructive now than in the past, it is because there are more of them and because they have more powerful means of destruction--not because of the Bible.

If the environmental crisis is in fact a religious problem, the question must be asked why other (non-Western) cultures are experiencing the same environmental problems as the Western world. It is questionable if those who control resources in non-Christian cultures live in less extravagant affluence than those in Judeo-Christian cultures.

Although there is some truth to the generalization that the Westerner sees nature as subordinate to man and the Oriental sees himself as part of nature, it is fallacious to believe that Oriental civilizations have been more respectful of nature than have Judeo-Christian civilizations. Ecological concern in ancient China, for example, arose in response to damage that had already occurred because of unplanned and careless use of land--even in antiquity.

The Judeo-Christian tradition affirms a derived dignity of both

man and nature and accords each a respect commensurate with its source in God. The Genesis affirmation of earth is repeated in other biblical passages asserting the worth, beauty, and order of the natural environment.

The biblical perspective provides no clear warrant for an exploitative, man-centered theory of environment. God has given man a unique role toward the rest of nature. Dominion does not necessarily mean, and does not have to mean, destructive exploitation.

It is possible that dominion over nature could be accomplished benevolently or with deference. A second theme moving throughout creation is responsible stewardship. It tempers the dominion given to man. Biblical thought sustains the view that man is a steward in the natural world. If man is master, then his mastery is limited. The command in Genesis 1 to subdue and have dominion is balanced by the instruction in Genesis 2 to dress and keep the land.



## IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has had as its purpose to examine a limited number of selected themes in Western religious thought, with the objective of discovering the influence of Western religion on attitudes toward nature and land. Consideration of the validity of Lynn White's thesis has been employed as a vehicle to assist in the examination. That thesis, again, is that Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for today's ecologic crisis.

Each of the themes of Judeo-Christian theology examined has been found to play a greater or lesser role in shaping Western attitudes toward nature and use of land. Of the five themes considered, the last two, wilderness and monasticism, have certainly resulted in the most dramatic and visible effects on the land itself. Many of the effects are tangible: clearing land; cutting trees; draining swamps; extending arable land; raising crops; grazing livestock; erecting monasteries, churches, and schools; transforming "evil" wilderness into "good" land.

The influence of the themes of dominion of man, stewardship, and Contemptus Mundi is more indirect and less readily perceived. The idea of man's being above and apart from, and having dominion over, nature, stems from the Judeo-Christian creation stories and is at least as old as the Pentateuch itself. Research for this paper has shown that this concept of man's dominion has, in fact, been important in molding Western attitudes toward nature and land.

In this connection, it is worth taking note of a 1970 New York

Times story reporting a conference on the theology of survival. The story reported that virtually all of the scholars participating in the conference agreed that the Christian stance toward nature has contributed to ecological problems. Citing White, they saw man's dominion over the earth as basic to the problem.<sup>65</sup>

The influence of the theme of stewardship in Western religious thought is perhaps as important as that of dominion, but certainly it is far less controversial. The concept of responsible stewardship over that which God has given, has undoubtedly affected attitudes toward the land from Deuteronomic times until the present day. The theme of care of God's gift of land, to include returning a tithe of the harvest and the sabbatical year of rest for the land, is directed in the book of Deuteronomy. In our own times the well-tilled and carefully-tended farm lands of such religiously-oriented groups as the Amish in Pennsylvania and the Mormons in Utah present graphic evidence of Christian stewardship in action.

The remaining theme considered, Contemptus Mundi, stemming from the Fall in Genesis 3, was a significant factor in influencing Western attitudes toward the world and nature, especially in the Middle Ages. It was the source of an otherworldly rejection of the earth as a suitable dwelling place for man and the cause of the medieval contempt for and distrust of nature. The theological concept of Contemptus Mundi is no longer widely adhered to. Negative attitudes toward nature, however, and toward the human body, are certainly still to be found today.

In light of the research conducted for this paper, it is con-

cluded that the ecologic crisis today does have a significant religious dimension, part of which at least, may be related to long-standing Judeo-Christian thought stemming principally from the first two chapters of the Bible. As White's critics indicate, however, it is fallacious to place entire blame on a Christian view of nature. There are important causes of environmental pollution, both in the West and elsewhere, which have little or nothing to do with religious thought, Judeo-Christian or any other.

Western man has indeed exploited his environment, often in apparent disregard of the rest of the created order. Such exploitation, however, is by no means a Western phenomenon. It is incorrect to believe that Oriental civilizations have been more respectful of nature than have Judeo-Christian civilizations.

The misuse of natural resources is by no means a recent development. From earliest times, and throughout the world, man has pillaged nature and upset the ecological balance. Erosion of land, destruction of animal and plant life, and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources started long before the Bible was written.

The Bible provides no certain warrant for an exploitative, man-centered concept of environment. On the contrary, biblical thought sustains a view of man as both master of nature and steward in a natural world.

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## GÉNESIS

Autenticidad del Génesis. Como todo el Pentateuco, así también el Génesis es obra de Moisés, aunque puede admitirse, y razonablemente parece ser así, que el legislador israelita para sus narraciones y genealogías ó listas de nombres que el Génesis contiene, se sirvió de otros documentos ó fuentes escritas anteriores.

El origen mosaico del Génesis, como en general el de todo el Pentateuco combatido y negado por los racionalistas y modernistas, ha sido posteriormente declarado y confirmado por las decisiones de la Comisión bíblica pontificia en sus Respuestas del 27 de Junio de 1906. En realidad, la cuestión de la autenticidad del Génesis no es diversa de la de todo el Pentateuco.

Valor histórico. El valor histórico del Génesis fué también en los tiempos modernos negado o puesto en duda por los racionalistas y modernistas, así como por algunos católicos, todos los cuales consideraban este libro sagrado más bien como un tejido de mitos o como una colección de leyendas populares. Mas esta opinión es enteramente contraria al común sentir del pueblo judío y á la constante tradición de la Santa Iglesia que vieron siempre y reconocieron en el libro del Génesis y en todas sus partes una verdadera historia.

El carácter histórico del libro del Génesis y en especial de sus tres primeros capítulos que eran más impugnados, ha sido afirmado y declarado por las decisiones de la Comisión bíblica pontificia en sus Respuestas del 30 de Junio de 1909, en las que enseña que las narraciones del Génesis no son meras fábulas tomadas de las mitologías

antiguas depuradas de los errores politeístas, ni tampoco alegorías ó símbolos desprovistos de verdad histórica y propuestas tan sólo con el fin de inculcar verdades filosóficas ó religiosas, ni leyendas en parte históricas y en parte fingidas, compuestas con el intento de instruir y edificar los ánimos, sino verdaderas narraciones de hechos que en realidad sucedieron. Los argumentos ó razones que prueban el carácter histórico de éstos y los demás capítulos del Génesis son los múltiples testimonios contenidos en las Sagradas Escrituras del Antiguo y del Nuevo Testamento, el común y casi unánime sentir de los Santos Padres y el sentido tradicional que derivado y transmitido del pueblo israelítico conservó y retuvo siempre la Santa Iglesia.

En especial insiste la Comisión bíblica en el sentido literal histórico de aquellos hechos que más de cerca atañen a los fundamentos de la religión cristiana, como son entre otros: la creación de todas las cosas por Dios en el principio de los tiempos; la creación y formación especial del hombre; la formación de la primera mujer, que fué tomada del primer hombre; la unidad del humano linaje; la felicidad original y primitiva de nuestros primeros padres en aquel estado de justicia, integridad é inmortalidad; el precepto dado por Dios al hombre para probar su obediencia; la transgresión del precepto divino por la tentación del diablo, disfrazado con la apariencia de serpiente; la caída de nuestros primeros padres de aquel primer estado de inocencia; la promesa del futuro Reparador y Restaurador del humano linaje.

Mas no pretende con esto la Comisión bíblica quitar ó excluir la libertad de interpretar aquellos textos que los Padres y Doctores entendieron de diversas maneras, sin fijar ni señalar nada cierto y

determinado, con tal que en esto se atenga cada uno al juicio de la Iglesia y á lo que dictan y prescriben las reglas de fe y las verdades ya conocidas.

Por lo mismo, claro está que no es preciso ni conveniente entender todas y cada una de las palabras en sentido literal propio, siendo así que se hallan frases metafóricas y antropomórficas que según recta razón no deben ni pueden entenderse en sentido propio. Es preciso también tener en cuenta que Moisés en el primer capítulo del Génesis no pretendió enseñarnos la constitución y el orden de la creación de las cosas visibles de una manera científica, sino más bien dar de ella un conocimiento popular y acomodado al modo de hablar y á la inteligencia de los hombres de aquel tiempo, así no es menester entender las palabras del texto bíblico en todo rigor científico.

En fin, la palabra yom, día, aplicada a los seis días de la creación, puede entenderse bien en sentido propio, como un día natural ó bien en sentido impropio como un espacio de tiempo más o menos largo, y en estas cuestiones se deja á la libre discusión de los exégetas.<sup>66</sup>

The authenticity of Genesis. As all of the Pentateuch, Genesis is likewise the work of Moses; even though it may be said, and it seems reasonable to assume, that the Israelite law giver made use of other documents or earlier written sources for the accounts and genealogies or lists of names which Genesis contains.

The Mosaic origin of Genesis, as well as that of the entire Pentateuch in general, so opposed and denied by the rationalists and modernists, has been subsequently clarified and confirmed by the Papal Biblical Commission's decisions in its Respuestas (responses, replies) of June 27th, 1906. The question of the authenticity of Genesis is, in fact, not different from that of the entire Pentateuch.

Historical value. In modern times, the historical value of Genesis was also denied or put into doubt by rationalists and modernists, as well as by some Catholics, all of whom considered this sacred book rather more like a fabric of myths or a collection of folk tales. Furthermore, this opinion is entirely contrary to the commonly held view of the Jewish people and to the steadfast tradition of the Holy Church, which always saw and recognized a true account in the book of Genesis, and in all of its parts.

The historical character of the book of Genesis, and in particular of the first three chapters, which were the most assailed, has been affirmed and explained by the decisions of the Papal Biblical Commission in its Respuestas of the 30th of June, 1909, in which it is shown that the Genesis accounts are not mere fables taken from ancient mythology and purged of polytheistic errors, nor allegories or symbols devoid of real historical truth and put forth only with the purpose of

inculcating philosophical or religious truths, now legends in part historical and in part imagined, composed with the intent of instructing and edifying the soul and spirit, but rather true accounts of events which actually took place. The arguments or reasons which prove the historical nature of these and the other chapters of Genesis, are the multiple testimonies contained in the Sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament, the common and almost unanimous interpretation of the Holy Fathers, and the traditional understanding, which, derived and transmitted from the Israelite people, were always preserved and retained by the Holy Church.

In particular the Biblical Commission insists on the literal historical meaning of those events which most closely concern the fundamentals of the Christian religion, such as, among others: the creation of all things by God in the beginning of time; the creation and special shaping of man; the making of the first woman, who was taken from the first man; the unity of the human race; the early, original happiness of our first parents in that state of rightness, integrity, and immortality; the command given by God to man to test his obedience; the violation of the divine order by the temptation of the devil, disguised as a snake; the fall of our first parents from that primordial condition of innocence; the promise of the future Redeemer and Restorer of mankind.

Furthermore, the Biblical Commission does not by this seek to take away or rule out the freedom to interpret those texts which the (ecclesiastical) Fathers and Scholars understood in various ways, without settling on or deciding anything as certain and determined, provided

that in this matter everyone conform to the judgment of the Church and to that which the rules of faith and known truths pronounce and prescribe.

For the same reason, it is apparent that it is neither essential nor advantageous to understand each and every word in the literal sense, inasmuch as there are metaphorical and anthropomorphic expressions which, in accordance with common sense, ought not to be, nor can be, understood literally. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that, in the first chapter of Genesis, Moses did not intend to show us in a scientific way the makeup and arrangement of the creation of visible things, but rather to give us a commonplace knowledge of creation in accordance with the manner of speaking and the intelligence of men in those days. Thus it is not necessary to interpret the words of the biblical text in a strictly scientific sense.

Finally, the word yom, day, as applied to the six days of creation, can either be understood in the literal sense as a natural day or in a less literal sense as a period of time of longer or shorter duration; but these questions are best left to the discussion of the exegetes.