

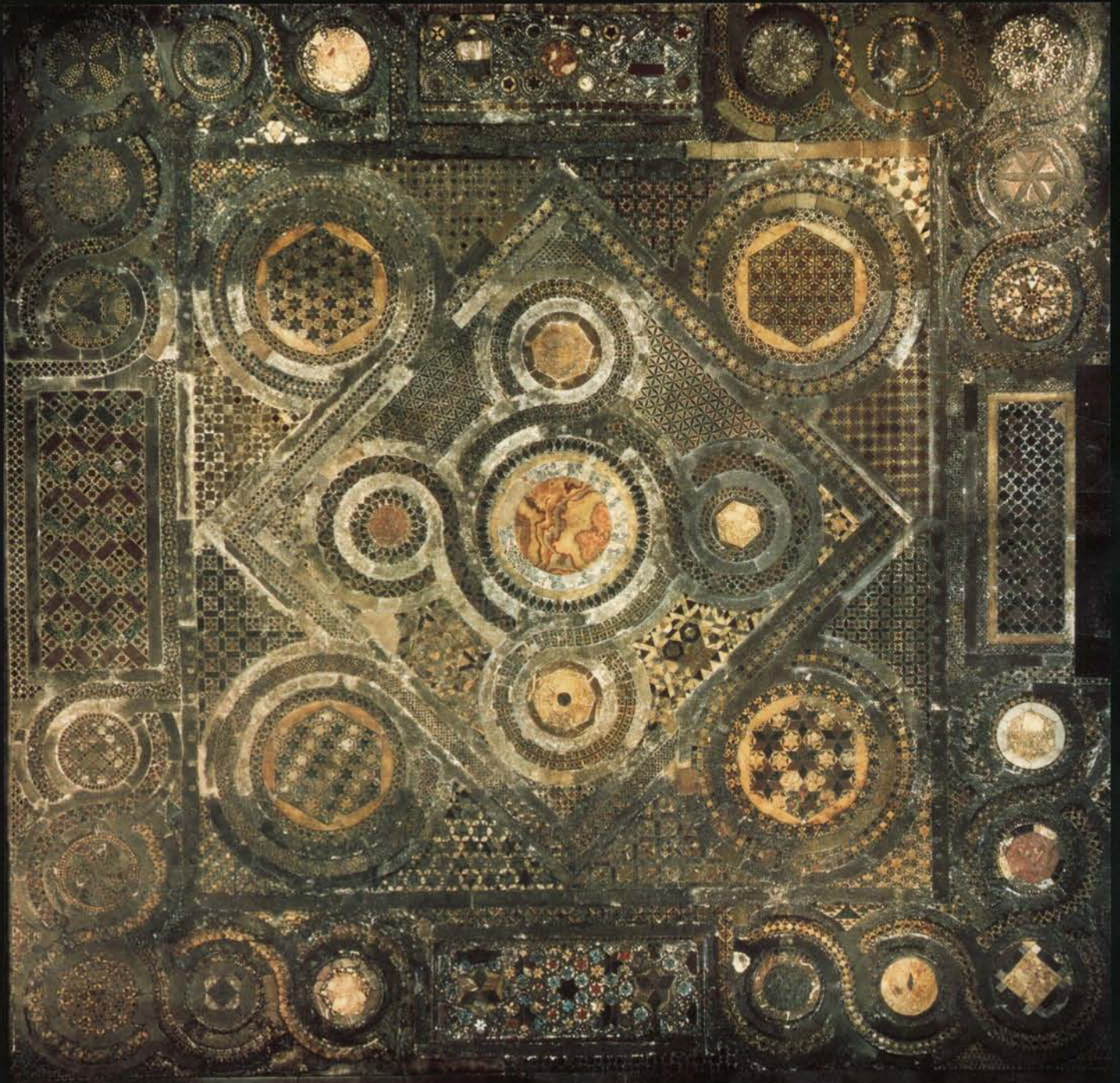
Rethinking Basic Assumptions...

The Ecologist

Volume 30 No 1. January/February 2000

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THE COSMIC COVENANT



MILLENNIUM ISSUE:
Re-embedding Religion in Society,
Nature and the Cosmos



Front Cover Illustration: The Great Pavement of Westminster Abbey



COVER & INSIDE FRONT COVER: DEAN & CHAPTER OF WESTMINSTER

Aquatint of 'The Great Pavement' produced for Rudolph Ackermann's history of the Abbey, published in 1812

The image on the cover of this special issue is the Great Pavement of Westminster Abbey, a square of *cosmati* paving set in the sanctuary of the Abbey by Henry III in 1268. This rare work of porphyry, limestone, serpentine and onyx is unique north of the Alps. The Pavement is an example of the medieval schemata that sought to bring together all aspects of the cosmos in one integrated design. The various shapes signify representatives of the animal kingdom; the square signifies the earthly reality of the four elements and our world; while the eight roundels suggest the heavenly bodies. All of this emanates from the mysterious ninth sphere, the central disc of onyx. With its triple aureole, the centre may suggest the 'divine source of All', or the completion of the universe.

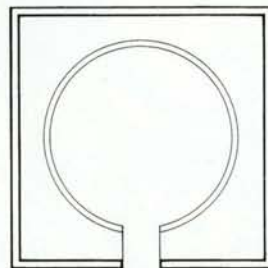
– Anthony J. Finnerty.

An account of the presentation given on *The Great Pavement 1268* by Anthony J. Finnerty at the 12th Annual Conference of *The Eckhart Society* will be published in the Spring 2000 *Eckhart Review*. Copies can be purchased @ £ 4.50 from the Secretary, Ashley Young, Summa 22 Tippings Lane, Woodley, Reading, RG5 4RX - tel./fax: 0118/ 9690118, email: ashleyyoung@aysumma.demon.co.uk, or visit their website on: www.op.org/eckhart.

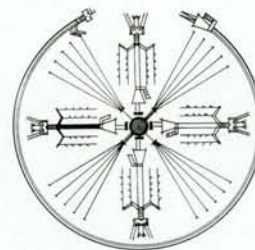
Back Cover Illustration: The Mandala

In the words of Mircea Eliade, author of *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, the mandala, like the Tibetan *Thangka Tsongkhapa* on the back cover, is "both a universal symbol and a symbol of the universe". The representation of the cosmos as a series of concentric rings has been common in many cultures. In this context, the mandala can be seen as an evocation of the universe, and at the same time a model of the soul's journey from the periphery to the centre of all understanding. This is a journey common to the initiates of Tantric cults, Australian Aborigines; even Chinese and Christians.

The mandala also bears a clear resemblance to temples and religious buildings from around the world (see accompanying illustrations). All these sacred constructions represent the universe in symbolic form: the various floors or terraces are identified with the various levels of the 'heavens' culminating in a 'centre'. This symbolism is involved in every consecrated place. In fact, in every 'centre' there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of earth to the level of heaven.



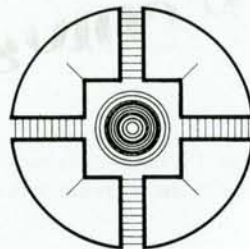
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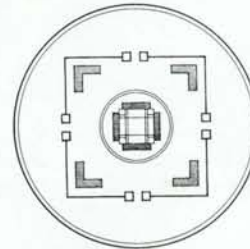
Navajo Sand Painting
The Plan of Mexico-



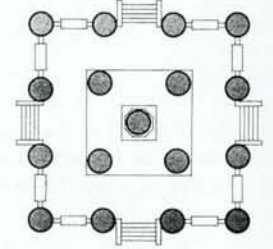
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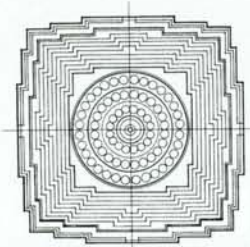
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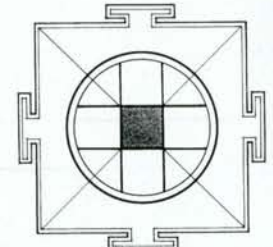
Plan of the Pagoda Yakushiji, Nara, Japan



Plan of the Temple at Borobudur, Java



The Shri Cakra yantra



A Mandala taken from a Tibetan Thangka

DIAGRAMS: THE CITY AS AN IMAGE OF MAN BY T.C. STEWART, LATIMER PRESS, LONDON, 1970.

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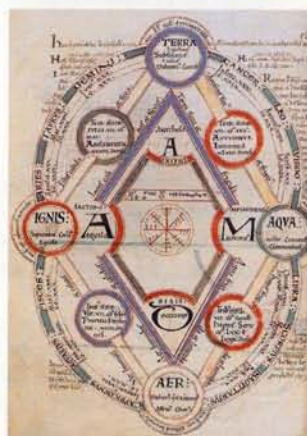
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Left: Cover of Byrthferth's 12th century Manual, which describes the symbolic meaning of 'The Great Pavement'. See inside front cover and page 40

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Editorial

By Edward Goldsmith



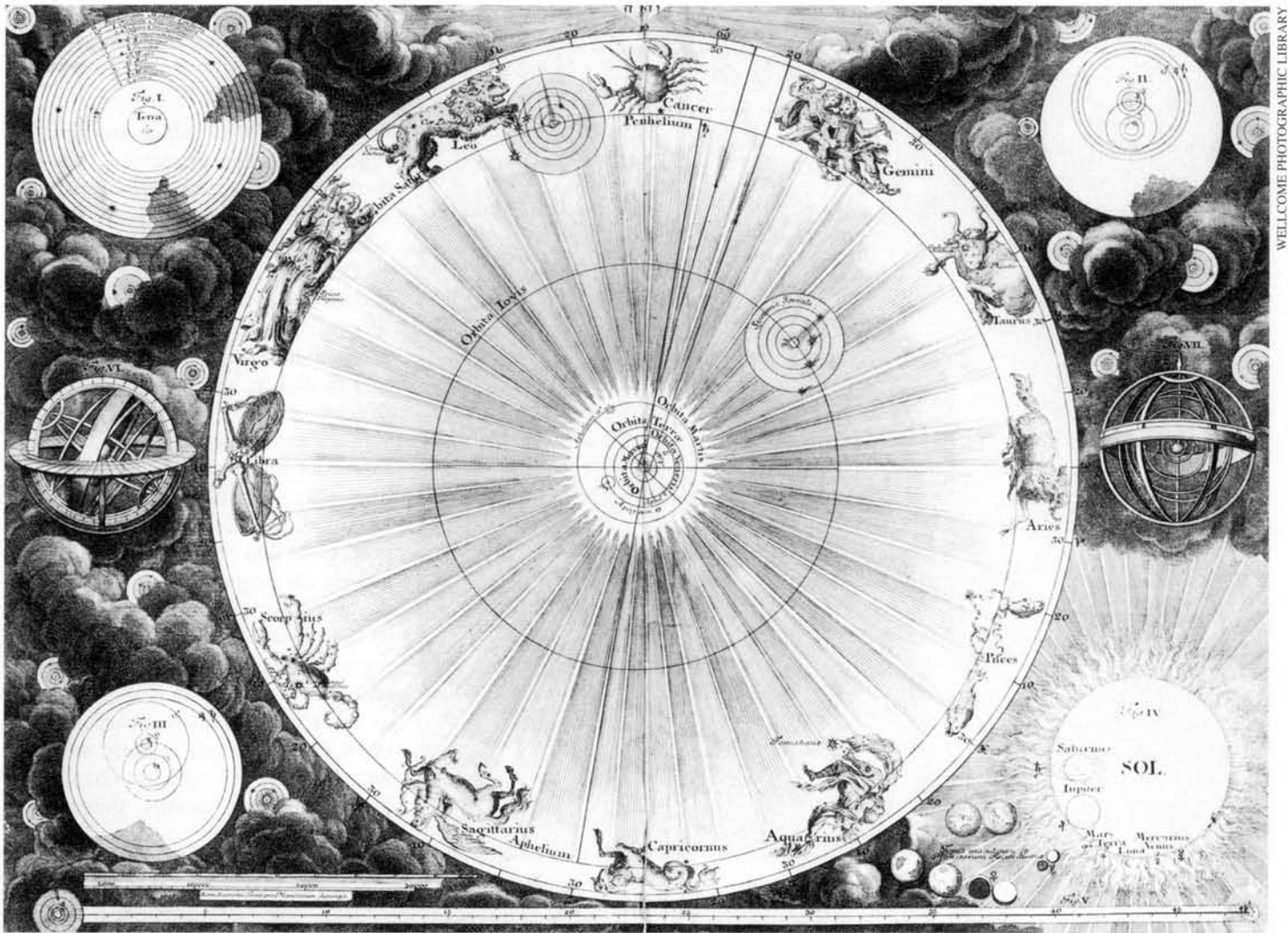
THIS SPECIAL MILLENNIUM ISSUE is a new departure for *The Ecologist*. It is about a subject that few modern-day environmentalists have seriously considered, particularly in the West, but which is nevertheless of great significance. It is about the role that religion can and must play in saving what remains of the natural world – which is God’s creation to religious believers – and which today is being annihilated at an exponentially increasing rate.

As the contributors to this issue make clear, religion once imbued people with the knowledge and the values that made the preservation of this creation their overriding priority. However, religion today has been very much affected by the shift from the traditional to the modern world, and despite the fact that the majority of the world’s people are still religious believers, it no longer fulfils its original role.

Fortunately, more and more theologians and environmentalists see it as a priority that we rediscover the wisdom inherent in ancient religions, and revive the cosmic or ecological theologies that once provided the basis of our respective religious traditions which we have now largely lost sight of.

Serious initiatives in this direction have already been undertaken, for instance by Peter Talbot-Willcox of The Religious Education and Environment Programme (REEP), who last year organised a key meeting under the chairmanship of the Bishop of London, at which the main speakers are among the contributors to this issue of *The Ecologist*.

It is perhaps no coincidence that many of the theologians and environmentalists who are now coming round to this important idea are doing so quite independently from each other. As Victor Hugo said “Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come.”



One of the fundamental tenets of early science was that the will of the Creator could be determined by discovering the laws of the Heavens and the Earth, thereby serving as a guide for personal conduct. A cosmological plan detailing Copernicus' astronomical vision, surrounded by diagrams of the systems of Ptolemy and Tycho Brahe. Line engraving by J.A. Friedrich after J.M. Füssli, 1732

is about on the same level as the gladiator's show. The creatures are fairly well treated and set to fight, whereby the strongest, the swiftest, and the cunningest live to fight another day. The spectator has no need to turn his thumbs down, as no quarter is given," a statement that clearly states what has come to be known as the 'gladiatorial' view of the natural world.³

To Lester Ward, the American sociologist, the terrible shortcomings of the natural world are, as Donald Worster puts it, "but an invitation to Man to become nature's engineer and create a paradise on Earth of his own design, whose functioning he can plan and direct in all its detail."⁴

Darwinians and sociobiologists concur. For them, it is possible to create a good world where we behave ethically towards each other, but for this to be possible we must declare war against the evil world of nature. As Huxley put it, "the ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it."⁵ This is one of the main tenets of what is in effect a secular religious cult, which follows in direct line from that of a number of well-documented religious cults that flowered in the early history of the Western world. One of the best-documented is that of the Gnostics, the 'heretical' early-Christian movement which, like mainstream scientists, saw the natural world as inefficient, more so, positively evil. They did not deny that

there was order and law in the cosmos, but believed it was "a rigid and inimical order, a tyrannical and evil law, devoid of meaning and goodness, alien to the purposes of man and to his inner essence."⁶

Hence, for the Gnostics, God and the cosmos were no longer intimately related, as in the Classical world. They had become alien to each other – indeed, opposites. So Man was condemned to cosmic solitude⁷ as he is condemned too by mainstream science. Jacques Monod, the Nobel Laureate, admits, on the other hand, that animistic man could see himself as an integral part of the natural world. "Animism established a covenant between Man and nature," he says "a profound alliance, outside of which seems to stretch only terrifying solitude. But today science has revealed to us the terrible truth, the ancient covenant has been broken, Man knows at last that he is alone in the immensity of the universe, in which he has no function, in which he has no duties, and in which he emerged by pure chance."⁸ This is an astonishing dogma, based largely on another dogma – that of the randomness of natural processes, especially the all-encompassing life process: evolution. Both are irreconcilable with any real knowledge of the structure and function of the world of living things.

However, there is one big difference between the position of the Gnostics and that of the mainstream scientists of today. For the former, God required that humanity break away from the evil world and restrict life to that of the spirit. The latter, though accepting the same premises, come to a very different conclusion. The world, they agree, is inefficient and badly designed – but the answer is not to hide from it but to redesign and transform it, according to their far better design. This is the



The Fine Flowers of Histories. A map of the universe showing seven stages of the sun at the centre of the cosmos and the signs of the zodiac, 1583

ultimate presumption and also the ultimate blasphemy. *Homo Scientificus* has deified himself. It is incumbent on him to recreate the world.

The critical importance of maintaining the order of the living world is only just becoming apparent to what is still a minority of scientists, largely as a result of the work of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. They have shown that the biosphere, or world of living things, together with its geological substrate and atmospheric environment constitute a single being. Lovelock refers to it as 'Gaia' – the Greek Goddess of the Earth. Lovelock stresses the critical importance of maintaining the order of Gaia. If the atmosphere's oxygen content were too low, then some species would not be able to breathe, while if it were too high, the Earth's atmosphere would become so inflammable that a single spark could set off uncontrollable fires. If its carbon dioxide contents were in turn too low, the Earth would be too cold, and if too high, its temperature would exceed that which most forms of life could support – a principle which scientists have ignored to the cost of humanity and the natural world. We are only now realising this; for we have systematically changed the composition of the atmosphere, and are caught up in what appears to be a chain-reaction towards ever-worsening climatic destabilisation.

The Importance of Holism

This brings us to the thesis of this unique Millennium Issue of *The Ecologist*. Contrary to what mainstream scientists tell us, I have consistently argued that natural systems at different levels of organisation seek, consciously or not, to maintain the order of the larger wholes of which they are part. The biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy was struck by the "whole maintaining character" of life processes at the level of the biological organism.⁹ So was the Austrian biologist Ungerer, who was so

impressed by the "whole maintaining function of life processes" that he decided to replace the biological consideration of purpose with that of wholeness.¹⁰

That the constituent parts of any natural system must strive to maintain its overall order is clear, because they evolved to fulfil their specific functions within it, and are thereby totally dependent on its preservation for their welfare and indeed for their survival. Eugene Odum, whose *Fundamentals of Ecology* was the standard textbook in American universities for decades, points out that "the individual cannot survive for long without its population, any more than the organ would be able to survive for long as a self-perpetuating unit without its organism."¹¹ Thus children brought up in a broken home, as any social worker will confirm, will often tend to be emotionally unstable and have a far greater chance of becoming social misfits, delinquents and criminals.

The family, however, cannot thrive as a little oasis of order in a sea of social disorder, and it needs to be part of a cohesive community, which is of such importance in the traditional world that people cannot imagine life outside of it. Nor, of course, can individuals, families, and communities, survive if the order of the natural world or the ecosphere is destroyed, as even the most extreme adept of the cult of selfishness will soon realise.

Unfortunately, this key principle only becomes apparent when life processes are seen in terms of their relationship with the whole of which they are part. Mainstream scientists who

Gaia and Science

The reason why the notion of this enclosing whole concerns us is that it corrects a large and disastrous blind spot in our contemporary world-view. It reminds us that we are not separate, independent, autonomous entities. Since the Enlightenment, the deepest moral efforts of our culture have gone to establishing our freedom as individuals. The campaign has produced great results, but like all moral campaigns it is one-sided and has serious costs when the wider context is forgotten.

One of these costs is our alienation from the physical world. We have carefully excluded everything non-human from our value system, and reduced that system to terms of individual self-interest. We are mystified – as surely no other set of people would be – about how to recognise the claims of the larger whole that surrounds us – the material world of which we are part. Our moral and physical vocabulary, carefully tailored to the social contract, leaves no language in which to recognise the environmental crisis.

– James Lovelock, quoting Mary Midgely, in a speech to the Gaia Society

insist on looking at life processes in isolation from the whole – whose very existence most of them choose to ignore – continue to see them as random, malleable, goalless and self-serving. This could not be better illustrated than by the writings of Professor Richard Dawkins of Oxford University, for whom there is “no selective advantage in displaying any concern for the stability and integrity of the larger whole.”¹²

If behaviour is looked at reductively, there is no way in which its ‘whole-maintaining’ function can be established, and hence no way of distinguishing between behaviour that serves to maintain and that which serves to disrupt the order of the living world. This key distinction is foreign to mainstream science – though critical to early archaic religions such as Judaism, as Margaret Barker in particular, makes clear elsewhere in this issue.

Why Mainstream Religions Have Failed the Earth

If it is impossible to reconcile the notion that environmental destruction is a sin with either mainstream science or Gnostic religion, so it is also difficult – though by no means so much so – to reconcile it with modern mainstream religions. For though they do not see the natural world and indeed the cosmos as evil, they have scarcely any interest in it.

Indeed, today, these 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 and an-ecological man and a God to whom is attributed these same characteristics.

Mainstream religion has lost its way, and needs to return to its roots, and even

Mainstream religion has lost its way, and needs to return to its roots.

go further and learn from the wisdom of primal people, a point strongly made by Father Bede Griffith in this issue. Darryl Wilson’s article ‘Grandfather’s Story’ confirms this same point by providing some idea of how American Indian tribal people saw their relationship to the cosmos.

The relevance of tribal religions is that they are totally reconcilable with the notion that the destruction of the environment is a sin – more so, it is often their most fundamental teaching. For example, Robert Parsons, in his book on the religion of the Kono people of Sierra Leone, shows that their religion “is not only an organisation of human relationships, but it includes also the relationships of people with the Earth as a whole, with their own land, and with the unseen world of constructive forces and beings in which they believe. Religion brings them all into a consistent whole.”¹³

To the Kono, “the Earth is more than a composition of inanimate particles of soil; it is a living being, the wife of God, with unlimited procreative powers producing the abundant tropical

Science and Ethics

The Taoist thought which created the beginning of science in China also was the underlying reason for the Chinese not to destroy the earth. As Needham points out: “... the sciences of China and Islam never dreamed of divorcing science from ethics.” But, in Europe it was quite different. “Science needs to be lived alongside religion, philosophy, history and aesthetic experience; alone it can lead to great harm.” He warns of the “unbelievably dangerous powers of atomic weapons” developed by modern science and hopes that “maniacs will not release upon mankind powers that could extinguish not only mankind but all life on earth.”

– Dolores LaChapelle, *Sacred Land*

vegetation. The main preoccupation of the Kono, like all tribal people, is to maintain cosmic harmony.”¹⁴

The anthropologist Henrick Kraemer¹⁵ also notes how, in primal societies, “the dominating interest is to preserve and perpetuate social harmony, stability and welfare. Religious cults and magic practices have chiefly this purpose in view. Everyone who has lived with a ‘primitive people’ and has tried to immerse his or her mind in theirs, knows the deep-rooted

dread fostered towards any disturbance of the universal and social harmony and equilibrium. Whether a violation of this harmony issues from the universal sphere – for example, by an unusual occurrence in nature – or from the social,

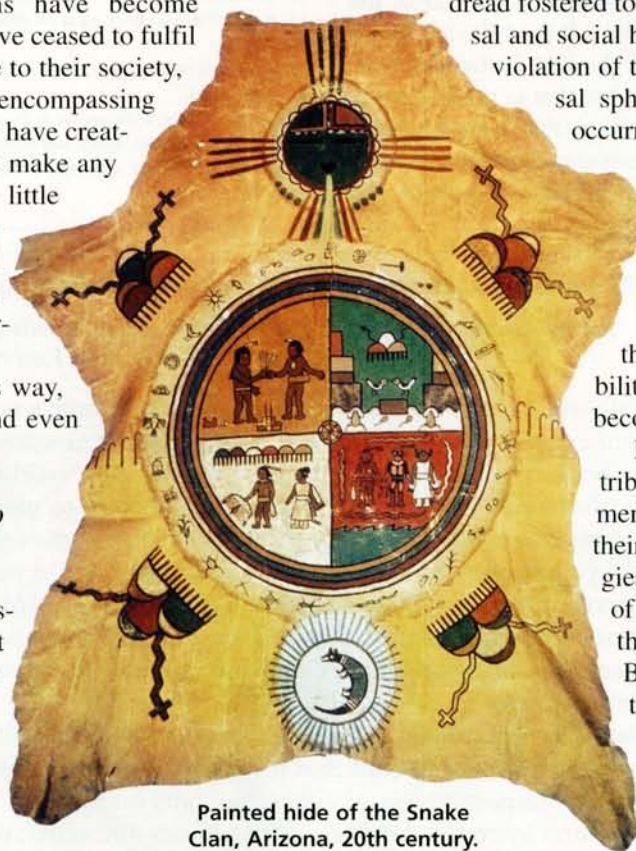
by a transgression of tradition or a disturbing event, it calls forth a corporate and strenuous religious activity towards restoring the harmony and thereby saving the fertility of their fields, their health, the security of their families, the stability and welfare of their tribe from becoming endangered.

In fact, just about all the activities of tribal people are geared to the achievement of this same end, whether it be their agricultural activities, the technologies they use, the design of their houses, of their temples, of their settlements or the performance of sacred rituals. Beyond their utilitarian functions, they all serve to maintain, in their eyes, the order of the cosmos.

Indeed, to violate this principle, in particular to neglect the performance of these sacred rituals, is to violate all sorts of taboo – and in

the words of Roger Caillois, “an act is taboo because it disrupts the universal order, which is at once that of nature and society.” By so doing, “the Earth might no longer yield a harvest, the cattle might be struck with infertility, the stars might no longer follow their appointed course, death and disease could stalk the land.”¹⁶ To violate a taboo is to be guilty of cosmic sin.

And, in fact, this can be seen to be true. The recent storms and floods in Orissa and Vietnam, and the increased incidence of devastating droughts throughout the world, are the result of cutting down forests and of transforming the chemical composition of the atmosphere so that it resembles ever less that which is required to maintain the order of the ecosphere. Whether we like it or not, the religio-culture of tribal peoples



Painted hide of the Snake Clan, Arizona, 20th century.

tells them the truth about their relationship with the cosmos. It does so, of course, in their special way – the way that would be best understood and believed in – not just intellectually, but with their heart and soul. It tells them the truth in the way that is most likely to be acted upon.

Religion and Ecology

The great anthropologist Roy Rappaport points out that the important question concerning the beliefs, or ‘cognitive models’, of primal people, “is not the extent to which they are identical with what the analyst states to be reality, but the extent to which they direct behaviour in ways that are appropriate to the biological well-being of the actors and the ecosystems in which they participate.”¹⁷ He might have added “and the welfare of the ecosphere as a whole.” “The criterion of adequacy for a model is not its accuracy but its adaptive effectiveness”¹⁸ – in the real holistic sense of the term. If primal beliefs or ‘cognitive models’ satisfy this criterion, then they are clearly ‘true’ in the most important sense of the word.

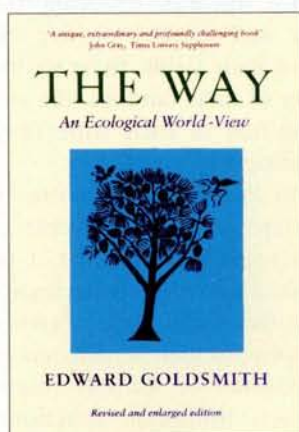
This is so, regardless of the fact that they may be formulated in the language of gods and spirits whose physical existence could be denied by our scientists. But to do so would miss the point. Whether they be historical figures or not is unimportant. They are, above all, archetypes. The same can be said of the truths of traditional mainstream religions. It is irrelevant to ask whether Noah’s flood as described in the Old Testament actually occurred. It may well have done, but that is not the point. The flood symbolises the forces of chaos that were let loose when people failed to observe the cosmic covenant. Noah’s flood was an archetype, not necessarily an historical event, and

its role as an archetype is incomparably more important in the determination of adaptive human behaviour than any possible role it may fulfil as a scientific or historical truth.

This brings us to the real purpose of this Millennium Issue. It is, above all, to show that these ideas figured prominently in the theology of our early mainstream religions, but that we have lost sight of them. If this is so, then they must be resuscitated, for it is only in this way that religion can inspire people to unite against the forces of chaos that are threatening our very survival.□

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“A unique, extraordinary and profoundly challenging book” - John Gray, TLS
 “An intellectually rigorous and emotionally compelling ecological world-view.”
 - Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*

First published in 1992, *The Way* is Edward Goldsmith’s *magnum opus*. This new edition has been extended and fully revised, and includes a glossary, page references and an index.

The book first provides a radical critique of the “world-view of Modernism”, which shapes all the disciplines in terms of which we seek to understand the world.

In terms of the world view of primal societies, human welfare rather than being maximised by promoting economic development and world trade, was seen instead as best being served by maintaining the critical order of the cosmos, which was always taken to encompass society, the natural world and the world of the gods. These, moreover, were all taken to be organised according to the same basic plan and governed by the same fundamental laws.

Whereas with us, major problems are interpreted as evidence that economic development has not proceeded far or fast enough, for such a society they indicated instead that it had diverted from the “way”, disrupting thereby the critical order of the cosmos. This interpretation is of course fundamentally correct, as most of the problems we face are due to the disruption of natural systems—families, communities and ecosystems—for which there is no technical solution.

A truly ecological world-view, as the author sees it, must necessarily be based on the world-view of primal society, whose members, significantly enough, were the only people who knew how to satisfy their real needs without annihilating the living world on which we totally depend for our welfare—indeed for our survival.

Edward Goldsmith is a campaigner and scholar. He is the author of numerous books and articles, and is the founder of *The Ecologist* (1969), of which he is still the editor. In 1991 he received the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize.

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Return to the Centre

By Bede Griffith

"In Australia a species of animals is personified, i.e. treated for certain purposes as if it were a human being, and in the mythology such personified species are regarded as ancestors or culture heroes. The function of this process of personification is that it permits nature to be thought of as if it were a society of persons, and so makes of it a social or moral order."

– A.R. Radcliffe-Brown

Where is the 'perennial religion' – the *sanatana dharma*, as Hindus call it – to be found? It is to be found in every religion as its ground or source, but it is beyond all formulation. It is not known by sense or reason, but by the experience of the soul in its depth. This depth is called the Centre. It is the source from which all religion springs, the goal to which it aspires, and it is present in the heart of every man. It was from this Centre that humanity fell, and it is to this Centre that it must return. Every religion seeks to make this known and to map out the path of return.

Every person must discover this Centre in themselves, this Ground of their being, this Law of their life. It is hidden in the depths of every soul, waiting to be discovered. It is the treasure hidden in a field, the pearl of great price. But it is hidden now under deep layers of habit and convention. The world builds up a great protective barrier around it. It is the original paradise from which we have all come – as Wordsworth said, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." We were all once innocent, but we have fallen into this world, and an 'angel with a flaming sword' prevents our return.

All these mysteries are hidden in the unconscious. The orig-

Above: The temple of Borobudur, Java dates from the 8th century A.D. and combines nearly all characteristics that occur in other religions. It is a sacred house, an object of pilgrimage, a symbolic mountain and a mandala

inal Paradise still stands, somewhere beyond us, but our layers of habit and convention are formed even at birth; binding us to this world, beginning their work while we are yet in the womb, weaving the great web of *maya*, which hides us from our true Self and makes us aliens from our home. Yet everywhere the path of return is to be found. Every myth and ritual of primitive religion is a revelation of the hidden mysteries of the unconscious and a pathway to the discovery of the Self.

If we are to find the path of return, we must be willing to learn from every ancient tradition, from African and Asian tribal religions, from that of the Australian Aborigines and the American Indians. All these people who have been suppressed and almost eliminated by the colonising races bear within themselves the treasures of the ancient wisdom. Our civilisation will remain for ever psychologically unbalanced until it has done justice to these people. In all these people, the sense of humanity's solidarity with nature has been preserved. Nature is, for them, not what it is to the scientific mind – an external object to be studied by cold reason – but a living part of their own being.

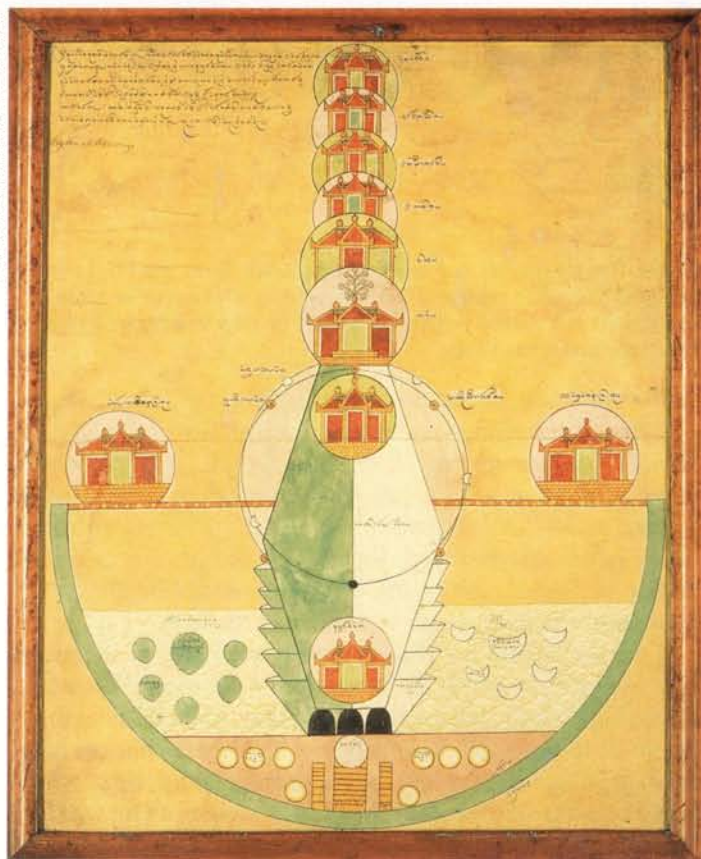
The follower of such a tribal religion knows himself or herself as part of nature, as having kinship with the Earth and the sky, with the plants and animals and birds. He knows himself as a child in the womb of Mother Nature, where the world, as Thales said, is "full of gods". These 'gods' are not fictions of the



Detail from the temple at Borobudur, Java depicting one of the stages towards enlightenment – the discovery of the Centre 'within oneself'

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The Temple as the sacred centre of the world from which all life emanates. This Axis Mundi passes through all levels of being that constitute the various levels of the cosmos towards the Divine

imagination; they are the living powers of nature, present in earth and sea and sky. They belong to the 'psychic' world; the world which we only know in dreams, but which is no less real than the physical world. In this world, there are also the spirits of the ancestors. Humanity knows itself not as isolated in this outer world of time and space, but as in communion with the

spirits of the dead. In the depths of the unconscious, we are one with all nature and all humanity, open to the divine Spirit which is in all, not enclosed in the prison of a separate individuality in an alien world. This ancient wisdom is enshrined in the temples of the Hindus. The temple is the image both of the cosmos and of the soul. To go around such a temple visiting the shrines of the different gods is to bring the soul into harmony with the powers of the cosmos, and to discover the 'centre' both of the cosmos and the soul. The centre of the temple is the garbhagriha – the 'womb' in which the lingam and yoni are to be found, symbols of the marriage of the male and the female which takes place here. The ritual of the temple is likewise an external sign of the inner transformation of the soul, the discovery of the divine life hidden in the soul.

So the breaking of the coconut is a symbol of the breaking of the hard outer shell of the soul, to discover the divine life within. The ashes put on the forehead are a symbol of the burning up of the lower self, the sinful ego, and the manifestation of the true Self from which all impurities have been burnt away. The red spot placed between the eyes is a symbol of the 'third eye', the eye of wisdom that is 'single', as opposed to the two eyes which see the world of duality. Thus, everything is intended to enable the soul to discover its 'Centre'; to free it from the separated ego and integrate it in the cosmic unity. It is a concrete symbol of the path of return to the Self, to the knowledge of God.

All these religions derive from the cosmic covenant – the universal revelation given to all mankind. It is a revelation of God through nature and the soul. The whole cosmos is a revelation of God. And thus, the order and beauty of the universe is a revelation of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. □

Bede Griffith (1906-1993) became a Benedictine monk in 1932, leaving his monastery 23 years later for India, to discover "the other half of his soul". In 1968 he settled at Saccidananda Ashram, in South India. He became a sannyasi, integrating Indian tradition into his monastic life. Deeply immersed in the religious traditions of the world, Griffith was a leading figure in cross-cultural spiritual dialogue.

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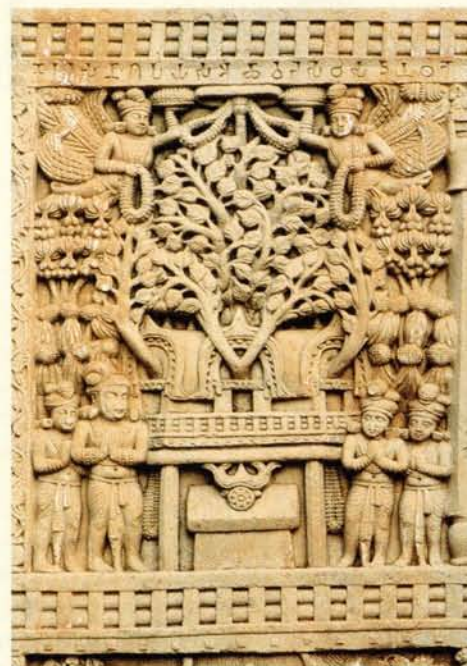
The Marriage Between East and West

It is the vision of a cosmic unity, in which Man and nature are sustained by an all-pervading spirit, which the West needs to learn from the East. It is this that explains the extraordinary sacredness which attaches to every created thing in India. The earth is sacred, and no ploughing or sowing or reaping can take place without some religious rite. Eating is a sacred action, and every meal is conceived as a sacrifice to God. Water is sacred, and no religious Hindu will take a bath without invoking the sacred power of the water, which descends from heaven and, caught on the head of Siva, is distributed in the fertilising streams of the Ganges and other rivers. Air is sacred, the breath of life which comes from God and sustains all living creatures. Fire is sacred, especially in its source in the Sun, which brings light and life to all creatures.

So also with plants and trees, especially certain plants like the tulsi plant and certain trees like the banyan. Animals are sacred, especially the cow, which gives her milk as a mother, but also the elephant, the monkey and the snake. Finally, Man is sacred; every person is a manifestation of God, but especially a holy man, in whom the divine presence can be more clearly seen.

This is the sacred universe, in which Man has lived as far as we know from the beginning of history and which has been completely demolished by the Western scientific world. Every trace of sacredness has been removed from life, so that Western Man finds himself in a universe in which both Man and nature have been deprived of any ultimate meaning. – *Bede Griffith*

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Detail from the Sanchi temple in Central India depicting a group praying to a sacred tree, 3rd century B.C.

The Tree of Life

The universal use of the tree as a religious symbol is extremely ancient (dating at least from the third millennium B.C.) and belongs to a rich body of myth. It mainly signifies 'the Centre'; the point of 'beginning,' where the forces of the sacred first broke through. In the symbolic language of myth and religion, the tree is 'the navel of the world' or 'the cosmic axis' (Axis Mundi) which stands at the centre of the Universe and passes through the middle of the three cosmic zones; underworld, Earth and sky.

Sacred architecture like the Buddhist stupa and the pyramid-ziggurat (such as those found in Mesopotamia and Mexico) represent the centre within the primeval mound which arose out of the infinite depths of the primordial ocean in the beginning. The tree is also closely associated with fertility. Artemis, the many-breasted tree divinity, is the Mother of Earth; embodying the powers from which all life emerges.

To shamans ranging from China to Asia, and from Oceania to the Americas, the tree is a bridge to heaven; symbolising the ascent to the sky world. To the Kabbalists, creation was the manifestation of an inner world of the Divine, and they used an inverted tree to symbolise this idea. A passage in the Book of Zohar reads: "Now the Tree of Life extends from above downwards,

and is the sun which illuminates all."

The tree of Life is not, however, the same thing as the Tree of Knowledge, which, according to Christians, led to Man's fall. After expelling Adam and Eve from Paradise, God left a cherubim with a flashing sword to guard the Tree of Life (Gen 3:24). This tree signified the essence of life, whilst the other signified the knowledge of good and evil. To the earliest Christians, Christ was sacrificed at the centre of the world, on the cosmic tree. And it was upon an altar under a banyan tree, attributed to Shiva, that Buddha chose to sacrifice his selfhood and achieve enlightenment. A cutting of this very tree is still venerated at Bodh Gaya. The Nordic god Odin sacrificed his Self on Yggdrasil, the World Tree, to gain the wisdom of the runes.

Essentially, the tree – the source of endless regeneration – is synonymous with imagination. In the words of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard: "Imagination is a tree. It has the integrative virtues of a tree. It is root and boughs. It lives between earth and sky. It lives in the earth and in the wind. The imagined tree imperceptibly becomes the cosmological tree, the tree which epitomises a universe, which makes a universe."¹ – *Stephanie Roth*

1. Quoted from Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1974, p.9



Man climbing a palm tree was a popular way to illustrate the following verse from the Bible: 'The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a Cedar in Lebanon' (Ps 92:12). Miniature from Beatus 'Commentarius in Apocalypsin', A.D. 975

Grandfather's Story

By Darryl Wilson

In the legends of my people there are many events in 'our history' that have precise meaning. Our traditions are passed down by oral 'historians'. As a people we have been taught, for all seasons, to listen to these stories and to apply the lessons within the stories to everyday life.

The story of Mis Misa is one of our most important. Mis Misa is the tiny, yet powerful, spirit that lives within Akoo-Yet (Mount Shasta) and balances the Earth with the universe and the universe with the Earth. Its assigned duty makes Akoo-Yet the most necessary of all of the mountains upon Earth, for Mis Misa keeps the Earth the proper distance from the Sun and keeps everything in its proper place when Wonder and Power stir the universe with a giant yet invisible *ja-pilo-o* (canoe paddle). Mis Misa keeps the Earth from wandering away from the rest of the universe. It maintains the proper seasons and the proper atmosphere for life to flourish as Earth changes seasons on its journey around the Sun.

This tale tells us that Akoo-Yet was the first mountain created, long ago, and that it is a spiritual place. It is a mountain that must be worshipped not only for its special beauty and its unique power, but also because it holds Mis Misa deep within it.

In the old lessons, and according to the old laws, to ascend this mountain with a pure heart and a real purpose, and to communicate with all of the lights and all of the darkness of the universe is to place your spirit in a direct line from the songs of Mis Misa to the heart of the universe. Few people are able to accomplish this. To do so, a person must be born for making and maintaining the 'connection' between his/her nation and all that there is – and for no other purpose. This is one way Nature has of ensuring the health of the whole Earth.

In a balanced society that experiences few interruptions, 'long-range plans' are maintained that will ensure the continuation of the society and the honouring of Mis Misa. The people will continue to live, it is said, for as long as the instructions from the spirit of the universe are honestly obeyed.

Traditionally, therefore, it is imperative that the practice of communicating with Mis Misa be maintained. Now that 'civilisation' has permeated our native homeland, of course, there are few Original People who think in this manner. The linear thought patterns of 'education' have made some of us ashamed of our language, our songs and our traditions.

But the imposing Euro-American intrusion into this hemisphere will never completely destroy our songs, or cause us to forget to think beautiful thoughts about all of the precious life that surrounds us – or to forget the ceremony that must be maintained in order for that precious life to flourish.

Akoo-Yet and Mis Misa are little known and may never be sacred to 'civilisation', to which Akoo-Yet is known as Mount Shasta. To modern people, no songs come from it. It is a 'natural resource'. It is property of the United States. It is a piece of real estate. Its timber is a valuable resource, and it must be subject to political gymnastics as individuals within the American government and corporate society connive to manipulate the

income from the sale of its forests for their personal advantage.

Neither the individuals of the American government nor the individuals of the corporate world 'see' the thousands of life forms that are a part of Akoo-Yet's forests. They do not 'see' the bacteria necessary to maintain that forest, they do not 'see' the animals and birds that are displaced or destroyed as the mountains are shaved clean of forests. They do not 'see' the insects and the butterflies of the forest as an element in balance with the universe.

However, they do see this mountain as an object that can be 'developed' to entertain the skier and the mountaineer. They dream of constructing villages upon its slopes and of constructing roads around it. In their 'land use' plans, civilisation intends to create a circus of this majestic mountain.

Grandfather's Warning

I remember visiting my aged Grandfather, in his shack in Atwam, California, way back in 1973. After a cup of bitter coffee from his stained mugs, my brother and I went outside to study the clear and perfect night sky. The early night was solemn. There was a hush, a quiet. Not even a coyote howled.



Wind, still. Wild, silent.

With a gnarled hand, the 90-year-old man pointed to the full August moon and said, "Can you see the scars upon the face of the moon, the injured land? That is what my grandmother spoke of long ago. She said there was once a war. It was a big war between thinkings. It was between those people who did not care about life and did not care if the moon remained a dwelling place, and those others who wanted the moon to remain a good place to live. That war used up the moon. And when the moon caught fire, there wasn't even enough water to put it out. It was all used up. The moon burned. A huge fire cooked everything. Just everything."

Later, just before dawn, we stood again with Grandfather in the early chill; *lok-mhe*, the light just before the silver of dawn. He told us of his fears of how this Earth could be *itamji-uw* (all used up) if the people of all of the world do not correct their manner of wasting resources and amend their arrogant disregard for life itself. Thirty miles to the north, Akoo-Yet shivered white against the velvet dawn sky. We were surrounded by the immense silence of the flat land of Atwam, where the Pit River meanders towards the sea.

Our talk turned to Akoo-Yet. "The power that balances the universe, Mis Misa, dwells there," Grandfather said, nodding a white head in the direction of the shining mountain. We knew that we were about to hear another story, so old that time could not erode it and so real that only truth and understanding could recognise it.

An old coyote howled in a black canyon somewhere to the south. An owl glided nearby, wings whispering upon the darkness, huge eyes searching for slight movements in the sea of darkness. Over near the mountains there was a soft roaring sound of falling waters as the winds brushed the thousand

pinus. The perfume of sage moved all around us. A meteor streaked across the night sky, a white arrow – vanished – as if it were but a part of an imagination.

In our custom, one is not supposed to intrude into the silence created while someone who is telling a story hesitates to either search for proper words or to allow the listener time to comprehend. At this moment, however, I thought Grandfather should be aware of some plans for the most precious mountain of all of the mountains of his life. "Grandfather, did you know the white man wants to make buildings upon Akoo-Yet?"

After a deliberate silence, Grandfather's frozen posture relaxed. Then he said, "Can you say why the white man wants to make buildings there?"

Sometimes I explained things to him like he was a child. "It is for money and entertainment. They have a ski lift on the mountain now so the people who want to slide down the slopes don't have to climb up. They ride on a chair. The chairs are pulled to the highest point by huge cables. Now they want to make a town on the mountain – a city."

There was another silence. Then, with the tired motions of an old grizzly bear, Grandfather said, "It must be time to tell the white people the story of Mis Misa." And he began to tell it.

The Story of Mis Misa

"When Quon (Silver-grey Fox), the power that created all that we know, and Jamol (the coyote power that still wants to change all that Quon has created) were through with making this land, it is said, the Great Power made a law, a rule. This 'law' Quon placed within Akoo-Yet. By doing this, Quon made Akoo-Yet the most powerful of all mountains. He gave the mountain a real job. My Grandmother told me of this 'law'. It is known as Mis Misa by our people. I have never heard it



NORTH MOUNTAIN BY FRANK LAPENA

called anything else. It is a small thing. You cannot see it, but you can hear it singing – if you listen carefully.”

There was a long pause. We waited. Often much of the meaning of the message that our elders offer is in the quiet between sentences, sometimes it is just a hesitation. But this silence could last for an unbearably long time. It is certain, however, that when you are in the presence of the old ones and they feel it is time for them to continue, they simply proceed and you must not forget where they left off – even if the story is continued a year later.

Breaking the silence, Grandfather continued, “We are told to be careful. Be careful while near this mountain. Always come to this mountain with a good heart. Mis Misa knows what you are thinking – always think good thoughts. Listen. If you do not listen you will not hear the singing, and this is not respect-

Once he showed us where he was going when he died. There was a small spot near the handle of the big dipper that appeared to be unoccupied. That was his destination. There is a glint there now.

ful. It is like breaking a commandment of the white man's god. You could be punished. Your whole family could be punished – even the children, the babies. That's what they say.

“The purpose of Mis Misa is but one: To balance the Earth with the universe and the universe with the Earth. When Quon created Earth and universe long ago, that power understood many things. Also that power knew that it could not make everything just right. That's a wise power. For this reason Quon made Mis Misa and put Mis Misa within the mountain. It lives there. You can hear it singing. Remember always this power. It balances the universe. It is a ‘law’”.

It was not many seasons later when Grandfather left us. His spirit had proceeded to its rendezvous with destiny. He was looking up into forever with clouded eyes. I longed to seek more answers from his wisdom, but he could not hear mortal beings now.

Once he showed us where he was going when he died. There was a small spot near the handle of the big dipper that appeared to be unoccupied. That was his destination. There is a glint there now.

Lessons from the Story

We look across the Earth today and see so much unnecessary destruction. Forests are being erased around the world. Rivers are sick and dying. The sky is grey over the huge cities. The air stinks. Pavement covers the meadows where flowers are supposed to grow. Mountains are moved and removed. Rivers are diverted and the water terribly polluted. Earth is being drilled into, and her heart and her guts and her blood are being used as private property for private gain.

There is an immense vacuum where the spiritual connection between human beings and Nature is supposed to be – that umbilical cord that we inherited long before our birth, and we were instructed to nurture and to protect for all of the existence of our nations. It seems as though too many people think that Nature is an element that they're not a part of. They, like the old Coyote, think that Nature, life, must be tamed, must be challenged, must be conquered, must be changed, in order to make it better.

History has unveiled many battles and many wars. In this era, we can look back through the pages of time like changing

channels on the TV. Yes, there have been some terrible wars. Yes, there has been much destruction. Yes, some wars have engaged the entire world. But those conflicts were over human supremacy – which king or which governing entity would rule the masses and control the bounty of Earth. Who would be the master over all of the people and who would control the wealth. Whose gnarled dreams would be unleashed at which time in history to make an indelible mark urged through vanity.

In these conflicts Mother Earth was treated as a woman slave. She had to yield the materials that were needed to continue the conflagration. She had to yield the waters for the thirsty battalions. She had to yield fruit and food to feed the armies that marched. She had to provide the medicine to heal the wounded. She had to provide the bounty that was the crown for the victor.

These are new times. The whole Earth is now threatened with extinction. No longer is it acceptable for human beings to contend for the supreme pinnacle of the various societies of Earth; from this moment forward there must be a battle, there must be an intense war – but this time for the salvaging of Earth itself. This time to see whether or not there will be only a ‘moon’ left here one day after all of the products are used up, after the balance of existence has turned for the worse, and after vanity has led us down a time-path that has an absolute expiry date.

Yes, Grandfather's story was only an old Indian story. But it was a story that has endured, and maintains its direction and its solemn concern. There is a moon – there is also Mis Misa. Not once have I encountered a reference to the symbolic power within that sacred mountain from the ‘constructionists’ and ‘progressives’ who plot the future of Akoo-Yet. The ‘constructionists’ see Akoo-Yet as a piece of valuable real estate. They fail to see its sacred value. For how many more seasons can these mistakes find pardon within Nature?

My thoughts lead me to walk among the stars every morning during the silver just before dawn, *lok-mhe*. Ringing in my ears are the worried words of Grandfather: “When I was a child long ago, my Grandmother said there was a war. It was a big war between the people – a war between thinkings. A terrible war. That war used up the moon. When the moon caught fire there wasn't enough water to put it out. It was all used up.”

I look up at the moon, and I worry. I look down at the Earth and see the corporate entities exercising greed and profit as their reasons for their existence. I see children crying and hungry all around the world. I see the land of my Grandmother and Grandfather being used up.

Yes, there is a callousness in the manner that people have abused the world. Yes, environmentally-orientated people must oppose that irresponsibility. Yes, children have a right to live in respect and harmony. Yes, Grandmothers and Grandfathers have an absolute right to peace and protection. Yes, we, the able and capable, have an absolute duty to defend our loved ones in their journey through life.

Yes, there will be a terrible and great ‘war’ again. There must be; for the silver of dawn, first light, belongs to us all, equally. We must not deny its panorama to anybody – especially those we are, by our spirit, bound to protect forever. We should not fear. Besides the dawn of day and the strength of the power that turns Earth around the Sun, we have Mis Misa. □

Darryl Wilson, a member of the A-juma and Atsuge tribes, commonly called the Pit River Nation, is a poet and storyteller. He is currently a student at UC Davis, California.

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Archaic Societies and Cosmic Order – A Summary

By Edward Goldsmith

“What man most passionately wants is his living wholeness and his living unison, not an isolated salvation of his soul. I am part of the sun as my eye is a part of me. That I am part of the earth, my feet know perfectly well, and my blood is part of the sea. There is no thing of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself. It is only the glitter of the sun on the surfaces of the waters.” – D. H. Lawrence



The character Tao

Across the world, from the beginnings of prehistory, the belief that society must follow a certain path – or ‘Way’ – in order to maintain itself, and the wholeness of the world around it, has been a common theme running through many societies and cultures. This Way, which a society must follow in order to maintain the order of the cosmos, is defined as that which conforms to traditional rules, or ‘laws’ – laws which the Ancient Greek referred to as the *Nomos*, or the *Dike* – meaning justice, righteousness or morality. The *Dike* was “the way of the World, the way things happen.”¹

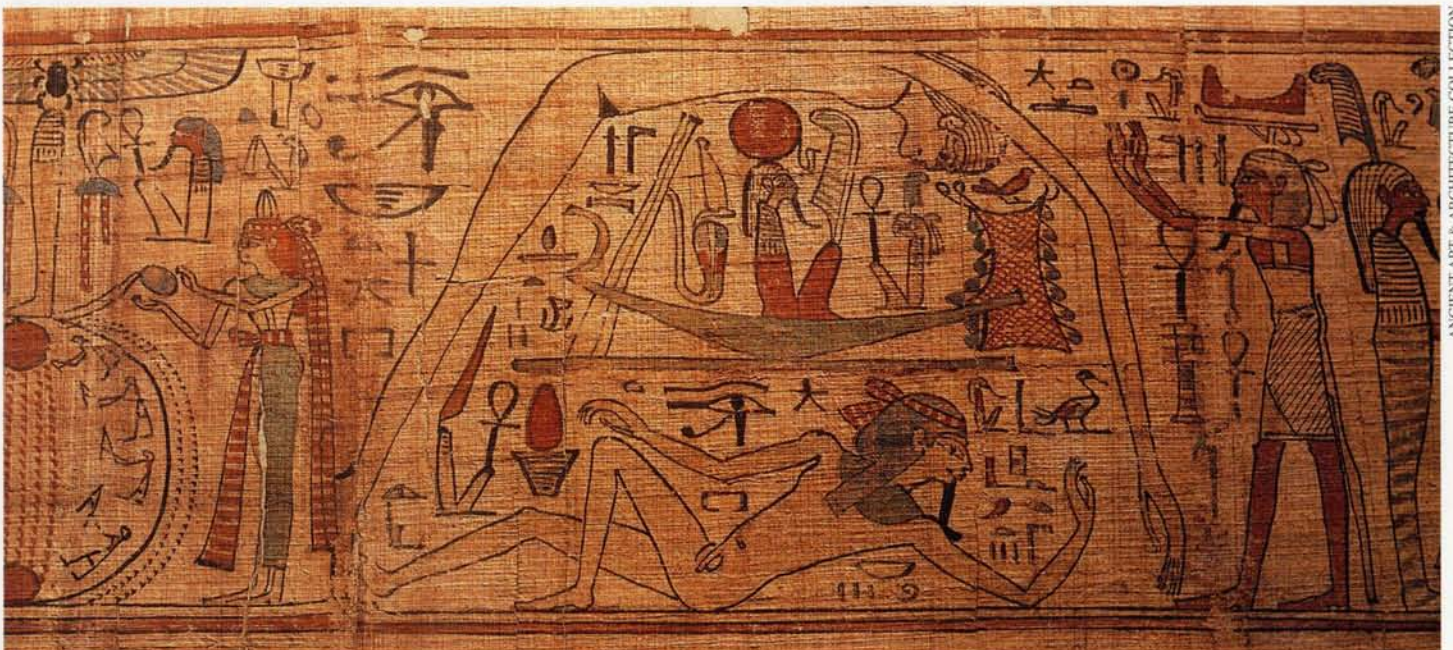
The Way was also referred to by the Greeks as *Themis*: “that specialised way for human beings which is sanctioned by the collective conscience.”² *Themis* was also taken to be the Way

The Heliopolitan view of the cosmos: the sky goddess Nut arches her body over her brother and consort, the earth god Geb from whom she is separated by their mother, the air god Shu. Maat ‘the right order in nature and society’ is at the centre. 1300 B.C.

of the Earth, and sometimes the Way of the cosmos itself – that which governed the behaviour of the gods. When these concepts later became personified within Greek mythology, *Themis* became the goddess of law and justice, and hence of morality. It also coincided with *Moirai*, the path of destiny or fate. In Homer,³ the gods are seen as subordinate to *Moirai*, and also to *Dike* – cosmic forces that are older than the gods themselves and that are moral. Against fate – hence against moral law itself – the

gods can do nothing.

The Way, then, according to the Greeks, was to be followed not only by all human beings, but by the natural world, by the cosmos and the gods themselves. There was thus a single law which governed the whole cosmic hierarchy. “*Themis* in the world of Zeus,” as Pythagoras writes, “and *Dike* in the world below, hold the same place and rank as *Nomos* in the cities of men; so that he who does not justly perform his appointed duty may appear as a violator of the whole order of the universe.”⁴ Much of the country’s vital force or sacredness was concentrated in the person of the king. So it was critical that he should religiously observe the Way. Thus Odysseus tells us that when a blameless king maintains the *Dike*, “The black earth bears wheat and barley, and the trees are laden with fruit, and the sheep bring forth and fail not, and the sea gives store of fish and all out of his good guidance, and the people prosper under him.”⁵



ANCIENT ART & ARCHITECTURE COLLECTION

The concept of the Way was probably entertained, explicitly or implicitly, by all vernacular societies. Thus, in ancient China, the *Tao* refers at once to the order and the Way of the cosmos. The term is applied to the daily and yearly “revolutions of the heavens” and of the two powers of light and darkness, day and night, summer and winter, heat and cold. “It rep-

The concept of the Way was probably entertained, explicitly or implicitly, by all vernacular societies.

resents all that is correct, normal or right (*ching* or *twan*) in the universe; it does, indeed, never deviate from its course. It consequently includes all correct and righteous dealings of men and spirits, which alone promote universal happiness and life.”⁶

The *Tao* was considered “not only as vaguely informing all things, but as being the naturalness, the very structure of particular and individual things.”⁷ Feng Yu-Lan sees the *Tao* as “the all-embracing first principle of things.”⁸ All living things, including humans, are part of this all-embracing natural order. “*Tao*, as the order of nature, governs their very action.”⁹ Humans follow the *Tao*, by behaving ‘naturally’. This means abiding by Lao Tzu’s principle of *Wu Wei*, for “when all things obey the laws of the *Tao*, they will form a harmonious whole, and the universe will become an integrated organism.”¹⁰

In Ancient Egypt, the concept of *Maat* fulfilled a similar role. It meant “the right order in nature and society as established by the act of creation... what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice and trust”¹¹ – not only in society but in the cosmos as a whole. Re was at once lord of the cosmos, lord of the judgement of the dead and lord of *Maat*. Although *Maat* came into being with creation, nevertheless it had to be renewed and preserved. It follows that it “is not only the right



Artemis as goddess of fertility, 2nd century A.D.



Amongst the descriptive terms for *Tao*, like the Yin-Yang emblem, there is also *chung* – The Centre, the centre of four quarters, the middle

Taoism and the Ritual Dance

Taoism saw nature as spontaneous and as having within it a natural balance which did not need rigid structures. One important function of Taoism with regard to nature is the role of cosmic liturgies. These are designed to rebalance the cosmos in much the same way as the Emperor rebalanced the cosmos in the strange mixture of Shamanic and Confucian rituals at the solstices at the temples of Heaven and Earth. In the Taoist liturgies, which are often commissioned by local communities who feel things around them are out of balance, the Taoist priest enacts a ritual dance of the cosmos. In so doing he draws into the microcosm of himself the universe and then rebalances the cosmos as well as making amends for any actions of humanity which have disturbed nature.

Martin Palmer, Chinese Religion and Ecology

order, but also the object of human activity. *Maat* is both the task which man sets himself and also, as righteousness, the promise and reward which awaits him on fulfilling it.”¹²

The centralised kingdom of ancient Egypt was run by a sacred king, whose role it was to maintain *Maat*; the order of the cosmos. “The sky is at peace, the Earth is in joy, for they have heard that (the king) will set right (*Maat*) in the place of disorder.”¹³ Tutankhamun “drove out disorder from the two lands and *Maat* is firmly established in its place: he made lying an abomination and the land is as it was the first time.”¹⁴

A similar concept existed in Vedic India. It was referred to as *R'ta* (see article by Krishna Chaitanya). We read in the Vedas that “The rivers flow *R'ta*. According to *R'ta* the light of the heavenborn morning has come... The year is the path of *R'ta*. The Gods themselves are born of or in the *R'ta*; they show by the acts that they know, observe and love the *R'ta*. In man’s activity, it manifests itself as the moral law.” *R'ta* also stands for the truth. Untruth, though sometimes termed *Asatya*, is usually expressed as *An-R'ta* – hence as a divergence from *R'ta* or the Way.

The Vedic poet fully realises that to obtain nature’s bounty, man must obey *R'ta*: for one who lives according to eternal law, the winds are full of sweetness, the rivers pour sweets. So may the plants be full of sweetness for us.” The great Vedic *Hymn to Earth* clearly expresses

the belief in humanity’s dependence on the order of the cosmos and in humanity’s role in maintaining it by observing the ancient law.

Later, the concept of *Dharma* was also used by Hindus in very much the same way. “That regularity, that normality of the universe, which produces good crops, fat cattle, peace and contentment is expressed by the word *Dharma* which means ... ‘support’, ‘upholding’.”¹⁵ It describes the way in which ani-

Classical mythology abounds with stories of the Earth taking her revenge on those who destroy the natural world.

mals, men or things are expected to behave; it is natural law. The sun is sometimes identified with *Dharma* because it regulates the seasons. Among the gods, Varuna is the Lord of Right, who lays down ordinances for the universe. The king on his accession is seen to have become to his people what Varuna is to the gods. For that reason, he too is known as the “Lord of Right”.

In Balinese Hinduism, *Dharma* is seen as “the organising force that maintains order, the organisation that governs the universe as a whole, the relationships between various parts of the universe and actions within the various parts of the universe.”¹⁶ The concept of *Dharma* was also taken up by Buddhists, who brought it to China. There, the *Dharma* of

JOHN MILES



A Tibetan pilgrim with prayer wheel

Mahayana Buddhism was identified with the *Tao*. The Buddhist *Dharma* is the universal law that embraces the world in its entirety. "It exists for the benefit of all beings, for does not its chief manifestation, the light of the world, shine its blessing on all men and things?"¹⁷ When a Buddhist Lama sets his prayer-wheel turning, he is performing a ritual that has deep meaning both in terms of *Dharma* and *R'ta*. He finds himself in sympathetic touch with the Wheel of the Universe; he performs the act, "Justice-Wheel-Setting in motion. He dare not turn the wheel contrariwise; lest that were to upset the whole order of nature."¹⁸

In the Persian *Avestas*, the Way is referred to as *Asha*, the celestial representative of justice on Earth. "Justice is the rule of the world's life, as *Asha* is the principle of all well-ordered existence and the establishment or accomplishment of justice is the end of the evolution of the universe."¹⁹

In ancient Judaism, the terms used are *Mishpat*, meaning justice or right judgement and *sedeq* – most commonly translated as righteousness. These virtues are attributed to God, but "the overarching vision is of human society in harmony with heaven". (see Robert Murray and Margaret Barker in this issue). This harmony is *Shalom*, or peace. But in reality, it is a wider term, standing for the harmony between Heaven and Earth, the cosmic order or "the right functioning of all nature as God created it."²⁰

Wrong Turnings

According to this world-view, for a society to divert from the Way is to threaten the order of the cosmos itself, and thereby give rise to the worst possible discontinuities. The society is then best seen as following the Anti-Way; *An-R'ta* in Vedic India, *adharma* in Buddhism, *ou Themis* amongst Ancient Greeks or *Isft* (disorder) amongst the Ancient Egyptians.

For the Greeks, *ou Themis* was seen on such occasions as taking on the form of *Nemesis*, related to *Nomos* and *Nemos*, the sacred grove that was almost certainly the original place of worship of the Ancient Greeks, as it was of the Celts: *Nemesis*, the woodland goddess, identified with *Artemis* or *Diana*, inhabited such a grove. She was also a goddess of fertility, closely allied with *Fortuna*, "the Lady who brings forth the fruits of the Earth. She who dispenses good things can withhold them or dispense blights instead of blessings, the awful power which haunts the *nemos* may blast the profane invader of her sanctuary."²¹

Classical mythology abounds with stories of the Earth taking her revenge on those who destroy the natural world. So, *Erysichthon* whose name means 'Tearer of Earth', cut down a

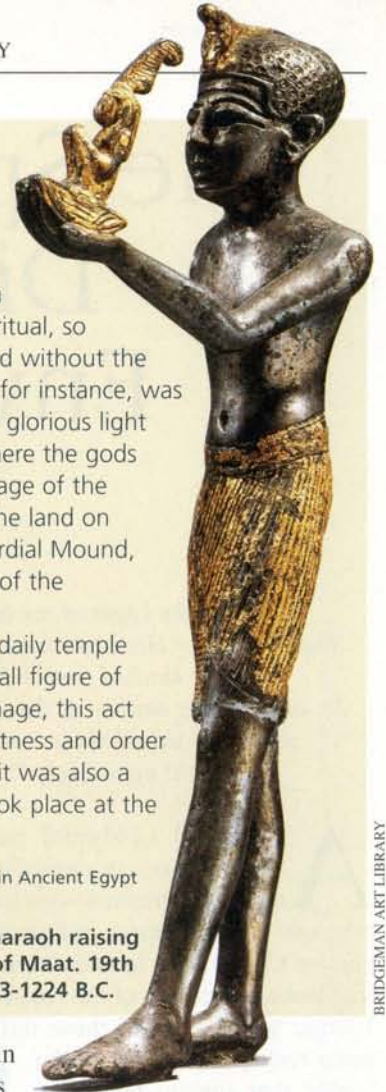
Egyptian Rituals and Cosmic Order

In Egyptian religion, there is a theology wound around the ritual, so that one cannot be considered without the other. The shrine of the god, for instance, was 'the Horizon', the land of the glorious light beyond the dawn horizon where the gods dwelt. The temple was an image of the universe. At the same time, the land on which it stood was the Primordial Mound, which arose from the waters of the Primordial Ocean at creation.

When, at the close of the daily temple service, the priest raised a small figure of *Maat* in front of the divine image, this act was meant to assert that rightness and order had been re-established, but it was also a repetition of an event that took place at the beginning of the world.

R. T. Rundle-Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*

Figure of a Pharaoh raising a small figure of *Maat*. 19th Dynasty, 1303-1224 B.C.



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tree inhabited by a dryad in spite of the tree spirit's protests. The spirit complained to Mother Earth, who afflicted *Erysichthon* with insatiable hunger. Orion boasted that he would kill all the animals in the world. This too was reported to Mother Earth, who sent a monstrous scorpion to sting him to death. Their star-signs oppose each other in the sky even today – a message, perhaps, to those who live now of the consequences of adopting a world-view that is in direct opposition to the interests of the Earth. □

This is an edited version of Chapter 61 of Edward Goldsmith's book *The Way: An Ecological World View*, published by Themis Books.

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The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis

By Seyyed Hossein Nasr

*"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;
The likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp
kindled from a Blessed Tree,
An olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose
well nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it;
Light upon Light." – Quran, 24:35*

As Edward Goldsmith has made clear in his article 'Archaic Societies and Cosmic Order', modern humanity has abandoned what has always been a fundamental principle of traditional religious world-views. The *Tao* of ancient China; the *r'ta* and *dharma* of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions; the *nomos* of the Ancient Greeks; the *shari'ah* of the Islamic world – all of these different concepts designate the same reality. They refer to the 'order' that governs humanity, as well as nature – from which comes the modern word 'cosmos', which literally means both order and beauty.

So, *nomos* in Greek meant not only the laws by which the planets moved, but also those which governed human life, and hence the laws by which the wise person should live. In Islam, the Greek word has come into Arabic as *namus*, which we regard as almost equivalent to the *shari'ah*, the Divine Law (a Quranic term), which is also identified with the laws of nature. The word *sunnah* in Arabic, which means both tradition and the wonts of the Prophet, is also used in the Quran to designate the wonts of God (*Sunnat Allah*) which are also the wonts of all living things. *Sunnat Allah* refers to the laws and norms that govern religion as well as God's creation – the principles by which the world functions.

The same holds true for *dharma*, even if this term is not associated with the personal God of monotheism. Nearly all contemporary Buddhist thinking about the environment rotates around this single concept of *dharma*, because *dharma* is not only related to the correct way of living, but also to the principles according to which things are what they are. In fact, everything in turn has its *dharma*. The streams, the flowers and the mountains have their own *dharma*; that is why this term is so difficult to translate into English. The same holds true of the

Hindu term *r'ta* (*Rita*), which is not only the law for human beings but also for the cosmos. The religious world-view points to a kind of mystery – the mystery of the relationship between laws that should govern us morally and spiritually and the laws that govern the universe.

The Spiritual Crisis

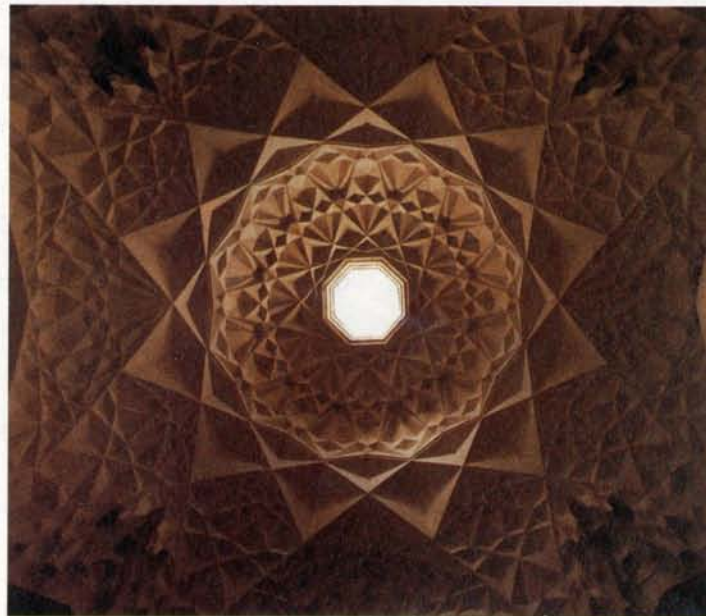
There is a profound relation between the two. There are currently some attempts by a number of scientists to try to rebuild this bridge from the other side. Professor Edward O. Wilson, the famous evolutionary biologist from Harvard, has published two essays which have been the cause of much discussion in the American intellectual establishment. He begins by saying that the humanities and science should come together and overcome

the separation that now exists between them. He further proposes that they should do so by developing the humanities on the basis of biology. He proposes that one should develop ethical and social laws for society on the basis of what natural scientists like him have discovered in the biological world.

This is not, however, how most religious people see the situation, because none of us wants to live under one form or another of social Darwinism, applying what people wrongly call the 'laws of the jungle' or some other so-called 'biological law' governing human society. In fact the image we have of the 'law of

the jungle' is itself an illusion, because if it were the only law involved, all the animals would already have eaten each other. In truth, we find that there is an incredible harmony in the jungle that applies to both living and non-living beings, a harmony to which little attention is paid by many modern scientists.

This idea of a scientific law pertaining to both society and the cosmos actually misses the real point – which is that many traditional peoples believed that their way of living was in keeping with how the world functions. They knew this despite their total lack of modern scientific knowledge, and this principle provided the basis of the function of the 'priest-kings' of various ancient civilisations. For example, the Chinese Emperor was the bridge between Heaven and Earth, and performed cer-



Khànaqàh ceiling, Mähàn, Iran, 15th century



Left: Cosmic Mountain from Behbahan, Fars, Iran, 14th century



Above: 'He is the One who gave unto everything its nature, then guided it aright' (20:50)

Painting of Hajji Bektashi, 13th century founder of the Bektashi Order

Below: The world is a veil concealing the Divine. The journey to God begins by removing this veil only to become aware that the veil and God are one and the same thing

tain rituals whose object it was to maintain the harmony of the cosmos. The same principle can be observed in the function of the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt, Melchizedek in the Hebrew tradition, Saoshyant in Zoroastrianism and many others.

Science: The Religion of the West

We can no longer continue to regard the world of nature as one bereft of moral and spiritual value. Our ethical concerns cannot ignore the rest of creation. Non-Western people do not generally understand the 'secularisation of nature' which has taken place in the West. Although not aware of the philosophical background of the rise of modern science and the idea of domination over a segmented 'nature', non-Western people are none the less fully aware of the relationship between the applications of modern Western science and political and economic power. They tend to think that this science can help them gain power and domination over their own affairs, without thinking of its ethical, spiritual, or environmental consequences. That is why,



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM 'SUFİ: EXPRESSIONS OF THE MYSTIC QUEST', LALEH BAKHTIAR, THAMES & HUDSON, LONDON.

in the non-Western world, virtually all governments, from the left to the right, from the religious to the anti-religious, subscribe to the faith of modern science and technology, and espouse the cause of industrialisation at the greatest possible pace. This is remarkable, given the survival of the religious view of nature that still partly survives among their people.

For several years, in the 1970s, I was the President of Iran's leading scientific and technological university. Our university had agreed to the building of a nuclear power station in the port of Bushehr in the Persian Gulf. The students in the university who were opposed to this project would come out nearly every day with pronouncements of how foolish it was to build such a dangerous installation. I was happy to agree with them, and told the authorities at the time that the students were right. I tried several times to stop this irresponsible project, but my voice was not heard, and it went ahead regardless.

As soon as the Islamic Revolution of 1979 took place, the building of the plant was stopped – but, as it turned out, not for long. Twenty years later, at an extra cost of several billion dollars, the plant is now being completed. It is a telling fact that, whether one has the Royal regime or the Islamic Republic in Iran – or, for that matter, the monarchy in Saudi Arabia, or the secular Ba'ath party in Iraq – the attitude towards modern Western science and technology is always the same.

At the root of this is the misunderstanding of non-Western people of what is really involved, of the dangers which threaten their religions and cultures; and of the desperate mistake it would be to repeat the errors of the industrialised West in every corner of the globe – often, ironically, as a means of gaining independence from the West. This is one reason why the whole environmental issue has been so late in sinking into people's consciousness in the non-Western world.

In the West, however, one has seen a very different process. Gradually, step by step, the religious view of nature has been lost – to be replaced by a mechanistic world-view. And now, after three or four hundred years (really since the trial of Galileo) the Western religious establishment is trying, one way or another, to reformulate a theology of nature. For that very reason, I believe that the Western thinkers who are dealing with this issue have a very grave responsibility – not only for the Christian or the Jewish world, but for the world as a whole. Quite obviously they have become much more aware of all the issues involved than many people in the non-Western world, who are only now turning to the environmental question. Nevertheless, the thinkers of non-Western religions have the advantage that amidst their co-religionists the sense of the sacred in nature and the legitimacy of a religious knowledge of nature has not been lost to the extent that it has in the West.

Helping Nature Recover

Let me conclude by giving a few practical suggestions as to what can be done at this late hour to reverse the critical environmental situation. I am certainly not opposed to individual or group efforts to clean up the Thames, or to prevent a particular tree from being cut down; thank God for such initiatives. But they can only delay rather than prevent mass disaster. The fact that we are murdering creation is what has to stop, and to stop it, we must first realise that we are responsible for our actions: we cannot sit down and do nothing on the pretext that this tragedy is the 'work of God', or is inevitable because of the 'march of progress and technology'. God holds us responsible for what we do and what we do not do but could and should do.

There is no alternative but to change our whole world-view. We cannot continue to entertain a worldview based on the sev-

erance of the relationship between humanity and the Divine, and hence between humanity and nature as a spiritual reality. We must restore this critical relationship, which means that the current modern world-view must be discarded. There is no other way. A compromise at this stage of history is the worst kind of treason. We have already made far too many compromises with the truth. Things have gone on day after day, year after year, in this manner, and they cannot go on doing so for much longer.

I do not see how the modern world, with all its presumptions, can survive. Nor can humanity survive while holding on to a world-view that is false to its very foundations. How can we go on electing governments that naively believe in continuous material development, without committing mass suicide? I do not see how, if we extrapolate all the present trends, as scientists tend to do all the time, and we continue on our present path, the Earth can continue to sustain human life, not to speak of life with any sort of quality.

It is in the light of these considerations that the religious view of nature becomes so important. Its resuscitation requires of course a very radical change. First of all, we must challenge not what science says within its own legitimate domain, but its monopolistic claims to providing the only true knowledge on every aspect of our relationship with our society and the natural world. We must realise the serious philosophical shortcomings of modern science and realise too that it is its largely inevitable applications that are rapidly making our planet uninhabitable. We must overcome the hypnotic trance into which we have been lulled, which causes us to deny, in the space age into which we see ourselves as entering, the relevance of all the traditional knowledge of the past.

It is not by conquering space that we can solve our real problems, but by addressing the real, fundamental cause of what we are currently doing here on Earth, to ourselves, to our families, to our greater family of living creatures, to the non-living creatures of the Earth and to the skies that we are also systematically polluting. We must realise that the traditional religious wisdom applies to us as much as it did to our remote ancestors, and that humanity must be seen, as it once was, as an inseparable part of the natural world, as God's creation and subject to the same divinely ordained laws that must be observed if we are to maintain its fundamental order.

It is this vision that we must regain if we are to live at peace with God, with ourselves, and with all of His creations both animate and inanimate, that His Mercy sustains and nourishes, even if, in our present ignorance, we are unworthy of His blessings.□

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Man, Nature and Cosmos in Vedic India

By Krishna Chaitanya

“...The goddess 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-Geeta, The Despondency of Arjuna**

The worldview of modern humanity has left us standing on the shore of oceans of pollution, or at the crater of a nuclear bomb-blast. This worldview started with a physics of the dead particle, which had no power of self-movement but moved only when pushed or pulled by a force wholly external to it. On this base was erected a biology of reflex reaction, which made organisms mere marionettes of random genetic mutations. We then moved on to the laws of dead matter, and of a bitter survival struggle which endorses murderous competition.

Next, we proceeded to create a psychology of the irrational and unconscious psyche, which made all reasoning a crafty rationalisation by a self-centred ego. The economics of deified self-interest and the politics of pressure groups and power blocs emerged with logical inevitability from such presumptions. The end result has been far from happy, and the number of people wondering if humanity will even be around for more than a few more decades is increasing.

The Faustian Pact

Modern Man has endless faith in his capacity to fix any problem – or had. Today, smug talk of the ‘clean bomb’ and ‘harmless’ fallout, and brave words about the ‘feasibility’ of building nuclear bunkers for millions – intended to reassure the population – have begun to sound grotesquely unfunny, even to those who sell the line. Many serious minds are by now convinced that a radical change in outlook is the only way forward for humanity.

Herman Daly, the doyen of ecological economics, rejects “the mechanistic, reductionistic, positivistic mode of thought that came to be identified with a certain phase of the evolution of science.”⁷¹ He feels convinced that redemption is not possible until we recover “teleology and purpose, the dominant concepts of an earlier age”. To do so, we must recognise and correct “the error of omission in our past treatment of ultimate means and of the Ultimate End.”

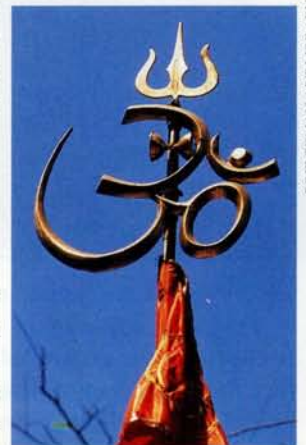
Lifton, the psychologist, stresses that the ecology movement will succeed only if the new relationship to nature becomes “part of a more general psychic renewal.”⁷² Many believe that part of this renewal will have to be religious in temperament.

Aldo Leopold, the great prophet of the modern ecological movement, was pessimistic about the conservation movement because “no important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affection and convictions.”⁷³ To quote Ophuls: “If human society is re-ordered, it will almost certainly have a religious basis – whether it is Aristotelian political and civic excellence, Christian virtue, Confucian rectitude, Buddhist compassion, Amerindian love of land, or something similar, old or new.”⁷⁴ Above all, what is required is “restoring the category of the sacred, the category most thoroughly destroyed by the scientific enlightenment.”⁷⁵

Help From The Hindu Worldview

The art of mythmaking moves from the visible to the invisible. But it first appraises the visible, and notes that all things about the world generally co-operate to a benign end; fostering the emerging of life, sustaining its growth and varied development. In the Hindu *Atharva Veda*, we find a prayer to the winds to send clouds bearing rain which will fill the rivers and make the corn grow in the fields. Even more subtle is the action of the winds on the waters. “When you breathe on them, the waters all become tasteful and medicinal herbs attain potency.”⁷⁶ This metaphysical principle, of a changeless ‘being’ behind the changing phenomena, was derived by poetic sensing, not mathematical reductionism.

Dawn is as old as time, but in Hinduism, the goddess of dawn is radiantly young at every appearance. “Immortal, she moves on in her own strength, undecaying.”⁷⁷ *Agni*, or fire, is also an ancient, yet ever-young, deity, for he flames forth in undiminished brightness when he is lit every day. Further, though a god, he has taken up his abode among mortals – in their domestic hearth. He is termed the ‘guest’, the ‘lord’ of the house. The energy of fire manifests itself in numerous forms, which suggests that behind the plurality of the world is a unity. Finally, *Agni* mediates between man and all the gods, for it is he who carries the clarified butter and the crushed juice of *Soma* leaves, symbols of the life-supporting productivity of the Earth, offered in the simple early ritual, to the ambient space



Shiva's trident symbolising the three-in-one at the heart of creation is depicted together with the meditative symbol of Om. According to Indian mythology, Shiva's meditations on mount Kailasa nourished the cosmos

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A temple in the trunk of a banyan tree which is attributed to Shiva

Vrita, Brahmahatya, a terrible retributive apparition, like the Erinyes or Furies of Greek myth, pursues him. Indra seeks refuge with the god Brahma, who tries to contain the apparition by allotting her specific dwelling places. One of these is the flora of the earth – the trees, shrubs and herbs. But they plead that this is too terrible a burden, and they should be allowed to pass it on to somebody else. Then Brahma decrees that whenever men cut down trees out of season and out of greed, the sin will automatically transfer to them.¹¹

One feature of the Kali epoch, when man's nature will sink to the nadir of grossness, will be that he will indulge in the wanton destruction of the flora of the Earth. We are in the Kali epoch now.

In the same epic, there is a discourse by the sage Markandeya on the four *Yugas* – or epochs – of mankind. One feature of the Kali epoch, when man's nature will sink to the nadir of grossness, will be that he will indulge in the wanton destruction of the flora of the Earth.¹² We are in the Kali epoch now. Finally, the Vedic poet realised that the peace he yearned for for man was indivisible

– it had to be shared with the world. "Peace of sky, peace of earth, peace of waters, peace of plants; peace of trees, peace of the universe, peace of peace, may that peace come to me."¹³

Myth as Ecological Reality

This brings to mind another instance of poetic legend – another myth which is underpinned by an ecological reality. Shiva is the deity of the Himalayas. When the Ganges, which was a river of heaven, was to descend to the Earth, it was feared that the force of its descent would shatter the Earth itself. But the matted locks of Shiva broke the fall, and the impetus of the waters did not destroy the Earth. In this myth, the locks stand for the Himalayan forests that break the fury of the tropical rains and conserve both the water and the topsoil of the slopes in ways beneficial to people.

There is also a further and profounder perception hidden in this legend. Bhagiratha is the legendary king whose devotion made the Ganges consent to come down to the Earth. But he brought the river not primarily for supporting the material life of the people, but for leaving the ashes of his ancestors within its sacred waters and absolving them of a sacrilege they had committed. This kind of perspective is rather difficult to assimilate for us. But perhaps we can begin to sense its deep validity if we recall the lines from Keats:

*"The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round Earth's human shores."*

It is time our age started having second thoughts about the intellectuality of which it is inordinately proud. Ecological science is, on principle, anti-isolationist. It is the science of total-

which is thus nourished and invigorated.

This strengthening of the vitality of the natural world is needed, for the continued well-being not only of the human race, but of the entire family of created things. For they all are part of the grand design and their well-being too is the concern of a deity. To each order of creation, deity has assigned a realm. "It is you who have fixed their realm in water for aquatic life. The wild beasts have spread over the steppes. The woods belong to the birds."⁸ As Aldo Leopold indicated, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

The Sin of Greed

The strange sounds that emanate from the heart of the woods, especially at the hour of twilight, the dim shapes that the eye seems to discern in the depth of the forest, generate that numinous awe which Rudolf Otto⁹ saw as the originating base of the idea of the holy. This, as well as the perception of the surging life of nature, that attains to a lush growth without the help of a tiller or the plough, can be seen in a Vedic hymn to Aranyani, the goddess of the forest. "The forest creaks like a cart at eventide. Who tarries in the forest-glade, thinks to himself, 'I heard a cry'. Sweet-scented, redolent of balm, replete with food, yet tilting not, mother of beasts, the Forest Deity, her I have magnified with praise."¹⁰ In Hinduism, then, the wanton destruction of forests is not just something merely inexpedient, it is a sacrilege.

In the *Santi Parvan* (Book of Peace) of the *Mahabharata*, which is an extended discourse on right living in all its facets, Bhishma, the preceptor, narrates a legend. When Indra slays



Shiva as Lord of the Cosmic Dance. Shiva, the eternal cosmic energy is the Creator of Time itself, yet while continuously dancing the universe, he remains somehow perfectly balanced: simultaneously still and active, ever transcendent to what he creates

ities. The Indian psyche was able to gain an insight into the totality because it probed with all the powers of the human person, both cognitive and affective. It saw the world-system as a *Vangmaya* or a meaningful utterance; as *Rita* or cosmic order; corresponding to the *Logos* or *Tao* of other cultures.

The 'sure purchase on the vertical dimension', the loss of which was stressed by Theodore Roszak, was gained by Indian thought through its analysis of reality as an evolving truth. The word *Sat* is reality in the metaphysical sense. Reality is not brute, disparate, isolated fact. Deity, the ultimate reality, reveals himself as *Rita*, the eternal order.¹⁴ In nature, this order establishes the directed, teleological rhythm of processes. It is this rhythm that makes organic life, and finally the social life of man, possible. Thus, in the sphere of human life, *Sat*, the real, becomes *Satya* – truth, or moral integrity.

Like Plato, the Vedic poets saw Reality as the embodiment and source of the three ultimate values: truth, goodness and beauty. "Firm-seated are the foundations of *Rita*. In its lovely forms are many splendid beauties. By Eternal law they give us long-lasting nurture. By Eternal law have the worlds entered the universal order."¹⁵ *Satya* was continuously strengthened by remembering the overall design of the world, and man's own role in further progressing it; and a deep faith in the grander ecology was expressed with the help of an image of surrealist power – a tree with roots above and branches growing downward. "In the limitless region, *Varuna*, of hallowed power, holds erect the tree's stem. The root is high above and the branches stream downward. May they sink within the secret recesses of our own being!"¹⁶

The same aspiration and commitment can be seen in the great Vedic 'Hymn to Earth.'¹⁷ The poet begins by expressing his ardent faith in what upholds the Earth. It is the working of the eternal order and man's consecrated living. He contem-

plates the achievement of that order which has bound "rock, soil, stone and dust" so that "trees, lords of forests, stand ever firm", which keeps in "unfailing flow, day and night, the waters that are common to all", and has created "corn fields that nourish quadrupeds and bipeds". His plea is as much a prayer as a commitment: "Whatever I dig from thee, Earth, may it have quick growth again! O purifier, may we not injure thy vitals or thy heart!" And he concludes: "Earth, my Mother, set me securely with bliss in full accord with Heaven!"

The Poetry of Redemption

After bitterly disappointing experiences with a science that has decayed into scientism and a philosophy that has taken to discussing trivialities with enormous seriousness, we have perhaps begun to realise that poetry itself may provide redemption. James Lovelock, in advancing his 'Gaia hypothesis', stresses the need to go beyond the mindset of expediency to a sense of the sacramental. The composition of the Earth, in all its richness, forms an organic system that maintains optimal conditions for the flourishing of life.

Schumacher¹⁸ said that the whole of human life is a dialogue between man and his environment. We pose questions to the universe by what we do, and the universe, by its response, informs us whether our actions harmonise with its laws or violate them. If we persist in our violations in spite of repeated signals of warning, then, there will be inescapable consequences.

The Vedic poet meant the same thing when he said that *Rita*, though benign, can be 'stern and fierce', in respect of transgressions. *Brihaspati* rides the fearsome chariot of *Rita* for destroying the wicked.¹⁹ But the wicked perish here because they are shattered against the throne of Eternal Law. The systemic unity of the world's incredible design makes the Vedic poet realise that an ideal conduct is expected if he is to benefit from the bounties of nature. This is what he prays for. "May sweet to us be the night and sweet the dawns; sweet the dust of the earth! Sweet be our father the sky to us!" However, the prayer begins with an acknowledgement of the poet's obligation. "For one who lives according to Eternal Law, the winds are full of sweetness, the rivers pour sweets. So may the plants be full of sweetness, the rivers pour sweets. So may the plants be full of sweetness for us!"²⁰ □

Krishna Chaitanya (1918-1997), one of India's leading writers and critics, wrote over thirty books on literature, culture, art, philosophy and science, including an eight-volume history on Mayalayam literature, a ten-volume history of world literature, and a five-volume synthesis of the physical and social sciences.

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Nature and Creation

*Do not be blind to the marvels of Nature.
One draught of Nature's elixir is better than a dozen
doses of any other drink.
Incomparable is the joy that Man finds in his world of a
thousand wonders when he lives in communion with
Nature.
From Nature unto Nature's God is the next clear step.
The entire Nature is saturated with the Divine Life of
Ahura Mazda.
All Nature bears witness to the existence of Ahura
Mazda.
Ahura Mazda is reflected in and known by His creation
such as the Sun, Moon, Stars, Earth, trees, air, water,
birds and beasts.
Therefore, do not cut yourself off from the light of the
Sun, Moon and Stars.
Do not pollute earth, air and water.
Do not cut tress nor destroy green vegetation but
transform waste-lands and deserts into gardens.
Refrain from killing birds and animals. Treat them with
love and affection and make use of them to improve the
lot of mankind.
Nature hates monopolies and knows no exception. It has
always some levelling agency that puts the overbearing,
the strong, the rich, the fortunate, substantially on the
same ground with all others.*

Thus spake Zarathushtra
Nature and Creation 61 – 73

The Cosmic Covenant

By Father Robert Murray

"Religion, among American-Indian people, is not conceived as a personal relationship between the deity and each individual. It is rather a covenant between a particular god and a community." – Vine Deloria.

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. I intend to attempt such a fresh reading in this article.

My purpose in doing so, however, is far from merely anti-quarian. The fruit of the research out of which this article comes has been a deeper conviction that the Bible has still much more to say which (at least in recent centuries) has gone unheard, but which it is now urgent to hear and ponder. The message concerns not only the crisis into which we have brought the Earth by presumptuous and unbridled exploitation of its resources, but also the value, precisely in the perspective of God's grace, of human insights and practices which are not unique to the Bible.

Have Theologians Betrayed the Bible's Message?

Recent essays in what might be called 'ecological theology' have strongly attacked the way in which the created world, and our relation to it, have been presented, both in much biblical interpretation of the scriptures and in the systematic theology which largely dictated its presuppositions. One much-quoted line of argument charges the Bible itself with responsibility for the exploitation of the environment, on the grounds that *Genesis I*, by giving humankind 'dominion' over all other creatures, encouraged the development of technology unchecked by a proper sense of reverence for God's Creation.²

Theological arguments concerning the interpretation of biblical creation texts and its frequent presuppositions are more serious and substantial. It is, indeed, true that *Genesis I* 'demythologised' Creation, in comparison with other accounts in the Bible – but it is not true that it 'secularises' the non-human world. Again, it is true that in *Gen. 1:28* God entrusts humankind with 'dominion' over other creatures, but the translated Hebrew verbs 'have dominion' and 'subdue' have been

alleged to connote far more violence than they properly.³ This has led to an interpretation that God has given us unlimited permission to exploit, which is, in fact, alien to the linguistic and cultural context of the passage. As we shall see, this passage actually pictures God's human creature as his responsible viceroy.

In fact, history has much to answer for in terms of this apparent biblical separation of humanity and creation. Theological presuppositions, mainly from the Reformation tradition, with Karl Barth and his followers, are now most blamed for a failure of systematic theology to incorporate a coherent doctrine of the created world and our relationship to it. The charges (brought most powerfully by dissatisfied Protestant theologians)⁴ centre on the tendency of Reformation theology to depend ultimately on only two poles: God the saviour and Man the saved, who received grace only through the death of Christ and faith in the gospel.

Though the world is created by God and is therefore good, it does not come within the essential drama of salvation by grace and faith: Catholicism is wrong (and is made fatally prone to idolatry) in drawing the world into the process of grace and salvation, both by valuing 'natural theology' and by developing a sacramental view of the world.

Another modern presupposition has also helped to hinder the development of an adequate theology of Creation. This is the all-pervasive assumption that the key perspective for understanding the Bible is history: that the essential theme of the Bible is sal-

vation, and its essential theatre is 'salvation-history'. In contrast to history stands myth; this expresses a vision of reality, characteristic of 'primitive' thinking, which of its nature is non-historical. It may formulate notions about the beginning and the end of history, but, most typically, myth expresses what is held to be true either metaphysically (for example, notions of basic dualism in the structure of all being) or in endless recurrence (for example, the cycle of the seasons and the Earth's fertility).

Of course, there is a mythical element in the Hebrew Bible. But if the basic structure of the Bible is only the divine-human polarity, and if its fundamental theme is the working-out of God's plan of salvation, the many passages which speak less historically of the created order and our place in it may be regarded as less important (perhaps also because the mythical idiom in the Bible is shared with, or even borrowed from, 'pagan' nations). On the contrary, this area of biblical religious thought enshrines supremely important ideas and ideals



Genesis 1: 1-24. 11th century ivory carving from the Altarpiece of Salerno Cathedral



Above: Combat of Ashur, the Assyrian national god - as sustainer of the cosmos - against the monster of chaos. Taken from a relief at the British Museum

Right: The Peaceable Kingdom by Edward Hicks, circa 1840.

of *order*: the order of God's Creation, displayed both in the whole cosmos and in nature on Earth; peace and justice in the relationships of humankind, as between nations, parts of society and individuals, and again between humans and animals; right thinking (wisdom) and right worship.⁵ Quite apart from historical narratives, the Bible teaches us that neither sin nor salvation are affairs merely between us humans and God. Sin entails an alienation from our nature, which relates us to God's other creatures, while salvation entails our re-integration in a vaster order which embraces the whole cosmos.

The Biblical Pictures of Creation

It is essential to realise that the Bible contains not merely one account of Creation or of its ordering. It contains several; and there are also stories or visions of the 'undoing' of Creation. Again, there are pictures not only of the ordered beauty of the world but also of disorder. Believers call the Bible 'the word of God'; if we take this seriously, it implies that God invited us to meditate on all these stories and pictures and to reflect on their variety.

It cannot be without significance that the final editors of Israel's traditions chose to place at the head of their collection the account of Creation which we read in *Genesis*. But nevertheless, it is not the only account in the Bible, and it is most unlikely that it is the oldest. While the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* show many links with ancient Mesopotamian tradition, the creation account in *Gen. 1* is in contrast with the Babylonian and other Creation myths, in which the creator conquers chaos in the person of a monstrous sea-dragon. It is likely, therefore, that allusions to such a myth in the Hebrew Bible are older than *Genesis 1*.

Thus Psalm 74, which contains perhaps the Bible's most varied series of images of both order and disorder, in its first and third sections presents fearsome visions of God's absence and silence (vv. 1-2, 9-11, 22-23); of the destruction of his temple on Earth (vv. 3-8); and of social order destroyed (vv. 18-21); in contrast, the central second part (vv. 12-17) evokes a picture of Creation as God's victory over 'dragons' and 'Leviathan' in the waters, followed by his ordering of the Earth, the heavenly bodies and the seasons. If the Psalms were texts for use in worship (as is surely true of most of them), what sort of context could call for this range of powerfully contrasting images? We shall return to this question.

Myth symbolises truths in narrative form. Apart from allu-



sions to Creation myths in this proper sense, the Bible contains many references to God's ordering of the cosmic elements by imposing limits on them and commanding them to keep their place. The elements are slightly personified (as they are not in *Genesis 1*), but not to the extent of a fully mythical narrative. Thus, God reminds Job how he confined the sea, saying "Thus far shall you come and no farther" (*Job 38:8-11*). This picture of God establishing order comes again in Psalm 104:5-9, Psalm 148:6 and *Proverbs 8:29*. *Jeremiah 5:22-23* contrasts the discipline kept by the elements with the disobedience of God's human creatures, a theme which becomes classic in both Jewish and Christian literature (cf. *1 Enoch 2:1* - 5:9; *I*



Clement 20, etc.)

In fact, human disobedience is regularly viewed in this context of order; the basic sense of moral sanctions, in the Bible as in other ancient literature, is that disorder brings its own nemesis. In the Old Testament, it is this which is fundamental rather than the story of disobedience in Paradise; no other biblical writers seem to know either that story or the idea of an original 'fall' affecting all humankind, till the (late) book of Wisdom and the subsequent growth of Christian 'original sin' theories.

The third, and most recent, picture of Creation is *Genesis 1*. It is majestically serene. There is no enemy to be either dramatically vanquished or even disciplined. There are no sea

monsters. The theme is still order, but God achieves it effortlessly by his Word. He creates order by separation,⁶ this brings about the vast diversity of creatures, on whose distinctness the priestly scribes will insist so as to establish as divinely sanctioned their basic laws of sacred and profane, clean and unclean. *Genesis 1* is a great prose poem on order – above all, as it is manifested in the liturgical calendar. It is arranged like a trajectory, rising to the fourth day and coming to rest on the seventh. The fourth day is the structural climax, when the heavenly bodies are created, to make possible the sequence of the calendar and its feasts. But in another sense the climax is the creation of the last order of creatures, humankind (*adam*, a col-

lective noun in Hebrew) in vv. 26-27.

The meaning of the 'image of God' has been much discussed: most probably it belongs to ancient thinking on the relation of kings to their patron deities⁷. Just as the author of *Genesis* 1 radically 'demythologised' his older material, so he 'democratised' the memory of kingship. Yet it is a kingly role that humankind has under God, and it is to be realised in behaviour like that of truly just and wise kings who govern their subjects in peace and moral order, the earthly reflection of cosmic order. God's original plan did not involve bloodshed, even by animals (vv. 28-30). Though *Gen.1* has developed beyond the oldest expressions of divine order, it is still implicitly in touch with their theme, at the centre of which lay the ideal of true kingship.

The same ideas underlie the following account, in a different key, of how God, like a craftsman, moulded the first human being and invited him to exercise wise authority over the kingdom of the animals (*Gen. 2:7, 19-20*). It is sad that these poetic first pages of the Bible have been so misread by those set on proving or disproving that they have anything to do with either history or evolution.

The Spoiling and the Restoration of Created Order

As we have seen, the Bible contains images of order spoiled or destroyed as well as established. One form of ancient myth ascribed the presence of disorder in the world to rebellious supernatural beings. Only a fragment of such a myth remains in the early chapters of *Genesis* (6: 1-4). (Forms of the older kind of rebellion myth are found in *Isaiah* 14 and *Ezekiel* 28 and are hinted at, with consequent disorder on Earth, in *Isaiah* 24 and perhaps in Psalm 82; the fullest extant version is in *I Enoch* 6-11).⁸ If evil was introduced on Earth by superhuman powers, then humans are to some extent victims rather than authors of evil; probably the author/editor of *Gen. 2-3* knew the old myths, but wished to present the human moral situation primarily in terms of responsibility for sin against God's revealed will. The myth of angelic rebellion was banished from the canonical Bible by most Christian traditions, but it has retained its power to suggest an alternative picture of the moral situation (see *The Book of Enoch and Cosmic Sin* by Margaret Barker in this issue).

The greatest image of world order destroyed is, of course, in the flood story, which is unquestionably borrowed from Mesopotamian sources. God resolves to blot out all who have turned to evil, preserving only the one righteous man, his family and animals, so as to preserve all species of living creature. The story is not of world destruction (God lets in the powers of chaos, but does not actively destroy his creation) but rather of purging the world so as to restore it, while bearers of God's blessing are preserved to continue life on Earth. Thus the flood is a great paradigm of warning but also of hope.⁹ As a narrative, it has the character of myth rather than history. God reaffirms 'cosmic order' (*Gen. 8:22*) by an 'eternal covenant' which he makes with both humans and animals (9 8-18). The inclusion of the animals is characteristic of the 'cosmic' vision of a covenant with God which represents a different mode of symbolic religious thought from the Mosaic covenant of law, and points to an origin in a different kind of milieu.

Despite the conventional classifications of biblical scholarship, a sensitive ear can recognise themes that must be related, though they are found in different parts of Biblical tradition. I believe that the 'eternal covenant' of *Gen. 9* reflects the same idea as the 'marriage of Heaven and Earth' which God promises to Israel in *Hosea* 2, 18-23; the royal blessings in *Isaiah* II

and Psalm 72; and the vision of peace under a restored Davidic king in *Ezekiel* 34.¹⁰ If it is objected by 'historicists' (be they naïve fundamentalists or sophisticated scholars) that "all this comes long after the flood," we must reflect again on the mode of thought in which these visions of peace and harmony are conceived. They formulate truths and ideals in a different language from that of history.

To return to the flood story; the scene after its end has another function within the book of *Genesis*. The point has been reached where a transition must be made from myth to the concrete world, in which blood is shed. So, in place of the original grant of only vegetable food (*Gen.1: 29-30*). God grants animals to humankind for food, but under laws of reverence for life which are to bind not only humans but even animals (*Gen.9:2-6*). There are now two programmes for human nourishment, one vegetarian (*Gen.1*) and the other carnivorous (*Gen. 9*). What the two passages have in common, clearly, is that humans are addressed as God's creatures, made in his image and as his responsible partners, whose rule must be exercised in peace, with reverence for life. Exploitation has no sanction in the Bible. Humankind is bound up with the rest of creation and the ideal images of peace and order link all creatures together. It remains to consider in what kind of context these images were expressed and celebrated; what they meant in their native milieu and what they can still say to us today.

Cosmic, Social and Moral Order in the Biblical World

To help us understand this broad theme of 'order' in its various linked spheres and senses, we must turn to passages which deal with the ideals and roles of those who, in the ancient world, were regarded as the divinely-appointed guardians of order – namely, kings. We have already seen how royal themes can still be discerned behind the accounts of the creation of the human race in *Genesis* 1-2. These were edited at a time when the Jews no longer had kings. The old royal blessings and psalms were re-interpreted as looking forward to one to come, anointed *mashiah* ('messiah') by God. But let us look at some passages from the time when kings still stood at the centre of the ordered world, not only in Israel but in neighbouring Syria, Egypt and Babylon (not to mention other cultures as far away as China).

Psalm 72 is a prayer for a king – the traditional title names Solomon – that God will endow him with his own attributes of *mishpat* and *sedaqah*. The first word is usually translated as 'justice'; the second has long been rendered by the old English word 'righteousness', but in different contexts it requires many other renderings: justice, correctness (especially of religious rituals), good deeds, victory, etc. In fact, these two words, which often stand as a pair, connote the sum of royal virtue, together with the blessings people hope to enjoy through good kings. So it is in Psalm 72. The basic prayer (v.1) is elaborated by asking in turn for merciful justice (1-2, 4, 12-14), peace and fertility of the land (3, 5-7, 16) and victory (8-11, 15, 17).

Anyone whose idea of biblical 'righteousness' is too restricted to the kind of sense which is familiar in the Pauline theology of justification will be amazed to see that the Psalmist prays for the hills to be fruitful with *sedaqah*, as well as with *shalom* (peace or prosperity – though it had the wider meaning of peace between Heaven and Earth). Once again, we see that salvation in the Bible has a far wider scope than has been understood by many Christians.¹¹

Another example is *Isaiah* 32. This poem starts with a vision of ideal kings reigning with *sedeq* and *mishpat* (32:1). There follow various brief evocations of order and disorder, both in

society and in the state of the land (vv. 2-14). The turning point is a hoped-for outpouring of divine power (v. 15), after which the land will become fertile with *mishpat*, *sedaqah* and *shalom* (vv. 16-17). Another Isaian vision, long familiar to Christians in a messianic sense, contains typical elements of a royal blessing, namely Chapter 11. Here, the gifts prayed for are wisdom, by the gift of God's spirit (vv 2-3), and then again merciful justice, by the gift of *sedaqah* (vv 3-5). There follows the famous picture of *shalom* symbolised by the harmony of animals not usually at peace with each other (vv. 6-9), and a final allusion to Paradise, "my holy mountain" (v. 9). All these examples illustrate how wide is the semantic field of cosmic and social order and peace connoted by the Hebrew words referred to.

It could be said that *sedaqah* is the Hebrew word for 'order' in this broad sense, corresponding to the Egyptian *ma'at* and analogous concepts in the other neighbouring cultures. This order is seen as God's plan for his creatures, established by his will; *sedaqah* is his own divine justice, in which his chosen kings participate by his gift. Its range of meaning embraces wisdom and active justice, good order in society and all its members, agriculture regulated by the calendar, correct cult in a temple whose structure and rituals alike symbolised cosmic order, victory over enemies, and of course, moral order, as is made clear in Psalm 19 (which some wrongly regard as two separate poems).¹² Though we lack proof, it is probable that in Israel, as in Babylon and Egypt, there were rituals which celebrated, and were believed to realise by a kind of sacramental enactment, the conquest of disorder and all hostile forces and the victory of true order. This, I believe, was the context for many psalms and other biblical passages of liturgical character.

After there were no more kings, the royal endowments were transposed by democratisation to become the virtues of all who are obedient to God's will revealed in his law. But the memories of kingship could not die, and so gave birth to messianic hope. The royal blessings were given a new, eschatological context, and in time Christians would relate them all to Jesus. The richness of the ancient royal ideology (even if people had forgotten it) still fertilised the soil out of which sprang the Christological 'hymns' in *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, the cosmic dimension of salvation which Paul brings into his vision in *Romans* 8: 19-22, and the transfiguration of the world in the last two chapters of *Revelation*.

Lessons for Today

What is the theological value of all this today? Certainly, we too must translate this theory of divine and Earthly order guarded by sacred kings into something more suited for a modern age, for such kingship exists no longer on Earth (at least, in the regions which claim to be civilised). When these ideas are translated, they can still speak to us about our place in the whole of Creation. If Christians have taken the vision only as prophetic of Christ's coming and the birth of the 'kingdom of peace', they have narrowed its scope and its importance for the whole human race.

Here, Christians can learn from Judaism, which (perhaps in reaction to Christian 'other-worldliness') has never lost its sense of the holiness of God's Creation and our duties to it. Whether or not there were actual liturgies for the preservation and restoration of cosmic and social order, as I believe are postulated by many Psalms and prophetic passages, the idea lives on in Judaism as *tiqqun olam*, 'preservation of the world'. This means, in effect, fostering the good of society; while in the thought of the kabbalist Isaac Luria, *tiqqun* is both the vision and the great work of cosmic restoration in which the mystic is

called to take part.¹³

The aspects of biblical teaching which have been emphasised in this article may prove both demanding and surprising reading. I believe that the biblical teaching analysed here implies a far more open and inclusive doctrine not only about the world, but also about both revelation and salvation, than the Reformed tradition has often allowed.

But, in conclusion, I would not wish to leave the reader with too complex a message. 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." No one has taught the proper order of rights and duties more clearly than that great modern thinker who belongs in spirit to both Judaism and Christianity, Simone Weil. She has criticised the whole modern theory of human rights as being conceived the wrong way round. What is basic is not 'human rights' (which are notoriously hard to define) but *needs*; the basic requirements for existence. Because we all share *needs*, we are all bound together in a network of *duties*. Where these are recognised, then we can define our *rights* as humans and inhabitants of Earth.¹⁴ This, I believe, offers us the framework within which we can begin to listen anew to the Bible's teaching about God's world and our place in it as his responsible creatures. □

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References and Notes:

1. The theme of this article, and all its points of detail, are treated at greater length in R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, Heythrop Monograph published by Sheed & Ward, London, 1992.
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3. J. Barr 'Man and Nature: The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 55 (1972) pp. 9-32. Cf. also J. MacQuarrie, 'Creation and Environment', *Expository Times* 83 (1971-72), pp. 4-9.
4. Cf. H.P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), esp. pp. 143-55; W. Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), esp. pp. 46-47.
5. The interrelatedness of these themes in the Hebrew Bible has been demonstrated by H.H. Schmid in *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968); for the broader implications see his *Altorientalische Welt in der alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), pp. 9-30. See J. Barton 'Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem', *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. 32 (1981), 1-18, on the extent to which this sense of order underlies biblical ethical thought.
6. Cf. P. Beauchamp, *Création et séparation* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne (etc.) 1969).
7. So H. Wildberger, 'Das Abbild Gottes: Gen. 1:26-30', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965), 245-59, 481-501.
8. These passages are discussed in *The Cosmic Covenant (Op.cit.1)*; see also M. Barker, *The Older Testament* (London: SPCK, 1987), esp. ch. 1, and her shorter book *The Lost Prophet* (London: SPCK, 1988).
9. See *Isaiah* 54: 9-10, and the contrasting visions in *Zephaniah* 1: 2-3 and 3: 11-12.
10. For a different analysis of these and comparable texts see B.F. Batto, 'The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Near Eastern Motif', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987), 187-211.
11. Not surprisingly, exegetes who were committed to the centrality of the Pauline doctrine, and understood it strictly within the limited polarity of God the saviour and the individual who is saved, would regard as most important in the Old Testament those instances of words of the *sedeq* family which most seemed to anticipate and support the Pauline doctrine (e.g. Gen. 15:6, God reckoned Abraham's faith as *righteousness*; *Habakuk* 2:4, the *righteous* shall live by his faith). Passages in which *sedeq* or *sedaqah* express quite other elements in their range of meaning too often went without significant comment.
12. *Op. cit.* 5.
13. For an introduction see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941; New York: Schocken Books, 1961), ch. 7.
14. This is the first part of *L'enracinement* (1949; ET *The Need for Roots*, London, 1952), reproduced as 'The Needs of the Soul' in *Simone Weil, An Anthology*, ed. S. Miles (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 105-140.

The Book of Enoch and Cosmic Sin

By Margaret Barker

"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

The *Book of Enoch* is the oldest apocalyptic writing known. In the centuries after it was written it was held in high esteem, but eventually fell from favour, and by the ninth century it had disappeared altogether. It was not until 1773 that two Ethiopic manuscripts were discovered in Abyssinia. *The Book of Enoch* was also 'rediscovered' earlier this century among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves of Qumran.

According to *Genesis*, Enoch "walked with God and was no more, because God took him away" (Gen. 5.24). This walking with God was understood to refer to special revelations made to him, and this – together with his mysterious disappearance – added to his popularity amongst apocalyptic writers. *The Book of Enoch* influenced later Jewish *apocrypha*, and left marks in the New Testament and amongst the works of the early Fathers. It still gives important insights into the Origin of Evil and Covenant theory (see '*The Cosmic Covenant*' by Robert Murray in this issue).

In two places in that part of *1 Enoch* referred to as the *Similitudes*, we read of a "Great Oath" which binds the forces of the Creation. At first sight, this seems to be an idea so bizarre that it cannot have any relevance to twentieth-century Christianity. When this idea of the 'Cosmic Covenant' is explored, however, it proves to be one of the most significant aspects of Enochic theology, and one which comes very near to much of what environmentalists are saying today. It provides a totally new way of looking at the Creation. Even though *1 Enoch* was known and used by the first Christians, this aspect of its theology was lost along with so much else.

The Great Oath

This important document, the *Similitudes*, describes Enoch's three visions, of which two are about a 'Great Oath'. In *1 Enoch* 41, all the heavenly bodies are kept on their course in



The Fall of the Rebel Angels by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1562

accordance with the oath which binds them. *1 Enoch* 69 sees the workings of the Great Oath. The first part of the text is confused, but we are told that the powerful oath was entrusted to the archangel Michael. The oath secures the order of the Creation, and holds the heavens firm and the Earth secure. It keeps the sea in check with a barrier of sand. It regulates the course of the Sun and Moon. Then there is a list of all the other forces of Creation: spirits of water, winds, thunders, hail, frost, mist, rain and dew. They all function safely through the strength of the great oath, and they praise the Lord of Spirits. The text here seems to be in the form of a poem or hymn, with a refrain at the end of each section:



*“And they are strong through his oath:
And the heaven was suspended before the world was created,
And for ever.*

*And through it the earth was founded upon the water;
And from the secret recesses of the mountains come beautiful
waters,
From the creation of the world and unto eternity.*

*And through that oath the sea was created,
And as its foundation He set for it the sand against the time of
(its) anger;
And it dare not pass beyond it from the creation of the world
unto eternity.*

*And through that oath are the depths made fast,
And abide and stir not from their place from eternity to
eternity,
And through that oath the sun and moon complete their course,
And deviate not from their ordinance from eternity to eternity.*

*And through that oath the stars complete their course,
And He calls them by their names,
And they answer Him from eternity to eternity...
And this oath is mighty over them,
And through it [they are preserved and] their paths are
preserved,
And their course is not destroyed.”*

– 1 Enoch 69.16-21,25

Binding the Creation

The idea of creating by 'binding' the forces of Creation – the elements – is very ancient. It was widely known among ancient peoples who believed in a cosmic or eternal covenant, which kept all things in harmony, in accordance with a divine plan. To break this covenant was to release forces which could destroy Creation. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for covenant, *b'rith*, is thought to be related to the word for 'binding'. The German word for 'covenant' is 'bund'. Its verb 'binden' means 'binding'. In effect, a 'Bund' is a *binding* oath.

The climax of the last vision of judgement in the *Similitudes* is the revealing of the Son of Man and his passing judgement on all those who had corrupted the Earth – binding them, so that evil passes away.

The 'Cosmic Covenant'

Covenant is a very important word in the Bible; the very names by which the two parts are known, Old Testament and New Testament, actually mean Old Covenant and New Covenant. By exploring the ancient concept of the eternal covenant, which is mentioned in the Old Testament, we may add another dimension to our understanding of Christianity as a New Covenant.

We think of *covenant* in connection with the great figures of the Old Testament – Noah, Abraham, David and Moses. Each covenant marks a step forward in the religious history of Israel. After the great flood, God makes a covenant with all living creatures that the Earth will never again be destroyed by flood (*Gen.* 9.8-11). Noah and his family are obliged in their turn never to shed blood, nor to consume it. With Abraham, there were two occasions of covenant; the land of Canaan was to be given to his descendants (*Gen.* 15.18-21), and all his male children had to be circumcised (*Gen.* 17.9-14). A covenant was made with Moses and the Israelite people at Sinai, when the Ten Commandments were given (*Exodus* 24.8), and the blood of a sacrificial ox was sprinkled on the altar and on the people to seal the covenant. A royal covenant – the eternal covenant – was made with David (*2 Sam* 7.13), promising to establish his dynasty forever.

The Great Oath, the Cosmic Covenant and the Eternal Covenant are all, in essence, the same thing, and we find the ideas in several parts of the Old Testament.

Shutting Out the Waters of Chaos

Genesis 1 offers several hints that it replaced an older account of the Creation story (see '*The Cosmic Covenant*' by Robert Murray in this issue). It is very different from the image of a binding and restraining of evil forces, although later traditions imply that this was the work of Day One, and so part of the forbidden mystery. Nonetheless, *Genesis* 1 gives a picture of ordered calm. God commands and it is done. The waters separate, the firmament appears and there are no hostile seas. Wherever the *Genesis* meditation on the nature of the world originated, it reflects a relatively late view of the Creation.

Nowhere is the older account of the Creation spelt out in the Old Testament. It has been overlooked. We have to pick up what hints we can from the prophets and the Psalms, and in the books which are not in the Old Testament. These fit into a coherent picture of a more violent Creation, where hostile forces were restrained by the power of God. Enoch's two short pieces on the Great Oath are the best extended account in existence.

Job 38 describes the Creation in a very Enochic way. The Lord asks Job: "who shut in the sea with doors... and pre-

scribed bounds for it?" (38.8-10); "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?" (38.31). This is exactly what we find in *Enoch*; binding the waters and the heavenly bodies. The 'Prayer of Manasseh', in the Deutero-Canonical, begins by addressing God as the one who shackled the sea, confined the deep and sealed it with his terrible and glorious name. Here, as in *Enoch*, it is the power of the name which binds the unruly forces. Here and in the story of the evil angels, which will be described further on, we find that water, depth and chaos are closely linked. Although not prominent in *Enoch*, this idea is deeply rooted in the Near-Eastern creation.

There are several legends about restraining the great flood and all that it represents. One, in the Babylonian Talmud, says that King David suppressed the great flood by writing the name of God on a potsherd, and throwing it into the deep. The power of the name kept the waters in check.

The Psalms are full of pictures of God's triumph over the waters, or rescuing his faithful ones from the threat of being overwhelmed by them. Psalm 18.16-17 says that the Lord rescues the Psalmist from many waters, from strong enemies and those who hate him. Time and again, we find that God sets bounds for the sea which it may not pass. They were the sign that the cosmic covenant was secure. Psalm 24.2 says the Lord founded the Earth on the seas. Psalm 46 describes the power of God in the midst of roaring waters which symbolise threatening forces; here they are raging nations (Ps. 46.6). Psalm 69 begins: "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck". Psalm 93.4 says the Lord is mightier than the sea.

Water, and the binding of it, is one of the strongest symbolisms in the New Testament. It is Jesus, the revelation of the Word of God, who 'binds' this unruly force forever. It is with water that one is baptised, and thus 'bound'. When Jesus stills the storm, the disciples ask: "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (*Matt.* 8.27). When the seer John sees the new Jerusalem, the first Heaven and the first Earth have passed away, and there is no more sea (*Rev.* 21.1). In all these instances, the sea represents what it had represented in the older mythology – chaos. Power over the sea was proof of divine power. Thus Jesus stills the storm, Peter is safe so long as he has faith, and the new Creation in *Revelation* has no more evil.

The Web of Life

The scriptures make clear that the everlasting covenant does not just bind the natural forces; it also includes moral restraints, and gives us a picture of one law embracing what we might divide into two: the natural and the moral. One of the best descriptions of this idea comes not from the ancient Near East, but from our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. In *The Way of Wyrð*, Brian Bates describes their world-view as he has reconstructed it from an ancient manuscript in the British Museum.

They had a vision of the universe, from the gods to the underworld, connected by an enormous all-reaching system of fibres, rather like a three-dimensional spider's web. Everything was connected by strands of fibre to the all-encompassing web. This image far surpasses in ambition our present views of ecology, in which we have extended notions of cause and effect to include longer and more lateral chains of influence in the natural world. The web of fibres of the Anglo-Saxon sorcerer offers an ecological model which encompasses individual life events as well as general physical and biological phenomena, non-material as well as material events, and challenges the very cause – and – effect chains upon which our ecological theories depend (p.12).

The Rebel Angels, led by Azazel, came down to Earth and taught men to make swords, knives and shields. Engraving by Gustave Doré, for Milton's 'Paradise Lost', 1866

This image of the web is very powerful, especially when contrasted with the linear way of thought, which sees one thing causing another in an endless chain, and one person holding ultimate power. Progress, pilgrimage, getting there and 'making it' are aspects of a linear view of life. The web view, with everything in all-encompassing interdependence, and several causes and effects in every rupture, whether in the material or non-material world, represents more accurately the thought-world of the cosmic covenant. Progress is not seen as a great alteration, exploiting what we have been given, but rather as healing through 're-binding'. The great restoration is about reconstructing the web.

The Old Testament contains many examples of the vision of destruction; of what happens when the covenant which binds the created order is broken. Some of the prophetic pictures of the broken covenant speak directly to our age of ecological crisis. *Isaiah* 24.4-6 sees heaven and earth withering. Note the parallel from the Lord's prayer: "on Earth as it is in Heaven".

*"The earth mourns and withers,
the world languishes and withers;
the heavens languish together with the earth.
The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed the laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,
and few men are left."*

This is the same picture as Enoch's, and the pattern continues to correspond. In *Enoch*, the broken covenant leads to the judgement; as it does here in *Isaiah* 24.21-22:

*"On that day the Lord will punish
the host of heaven, in heaven,
and the kings of the earth, on the Earth.
They will be gathered together
as prisoners in a pit;
they will be shut up in a prison,
and after many days they will be punished."*

The Old Testament describes the connection between 'fertility' and 'peace' in numerous passages (*Ezekiel* 34.25). Since peace is ensured by the covenant, its breaking will affect the fertility of the land. Such is the meaning of droughts and bad harvests. *Isaiah* 33:7-9 couldn't make this any clearer:

*"The envoys of peace weep bitterly,
The treaty is broken
Its witnesses are despised ...
The land mourns and wastes away...
And Bashan (smooth, fertile land) and Carmel (garden)
Drop their leaves."*



When the covenant is broken, powerful destructive forces are released and the Creation is at risk. We see another picture of this in *Joel*. Evil enemies had come against the land (2:2):

*"Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains
a great and powerful people;
their like has never been from of old
nor will be again after them
through the years of all generations."*

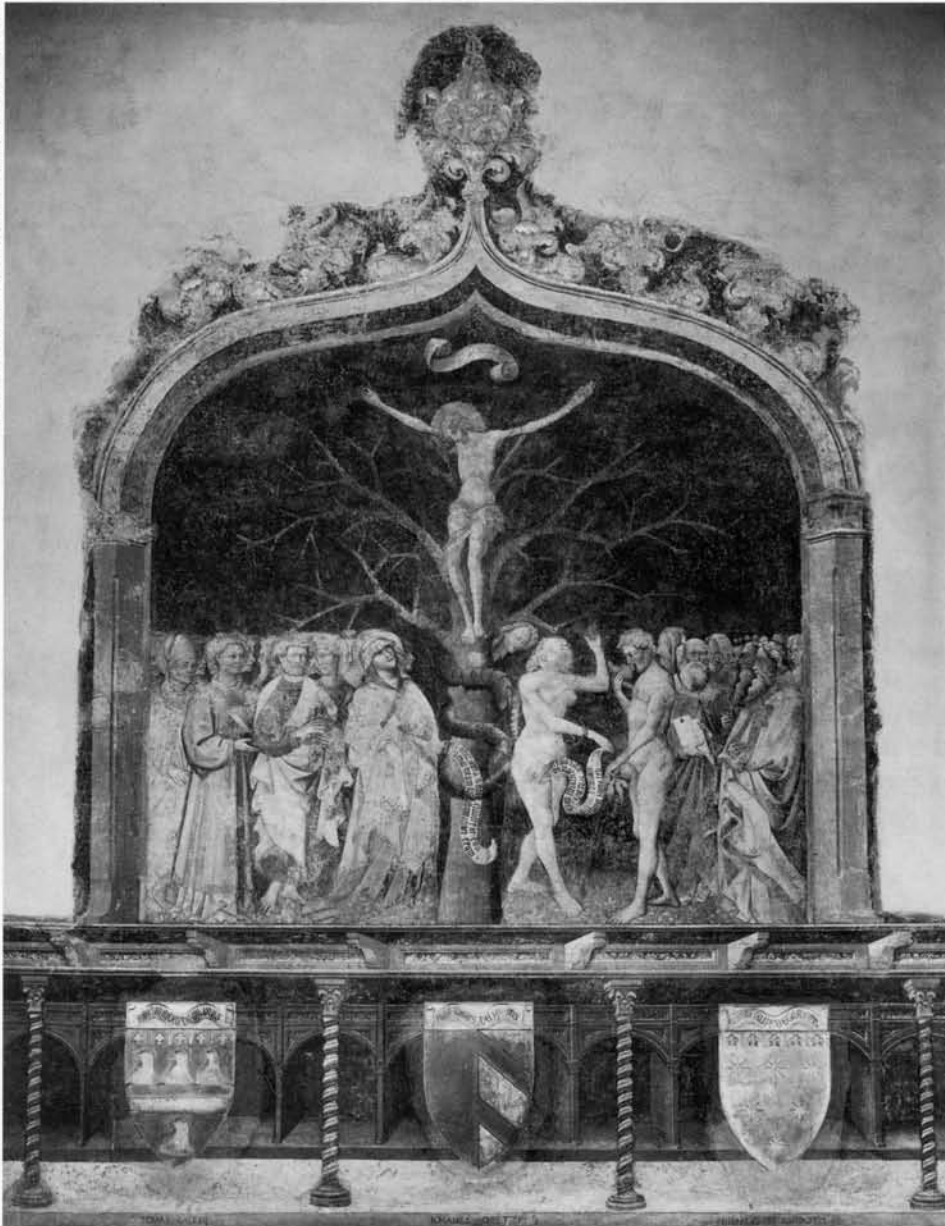
and the land itself had ceased to bear food (1:17):

*"The seed shrivels under the clods,
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are ruined
because the grain has failed."*

We think of the disasters of war and the disasters of famine as belonging to separate categories, but the prophets saw both as aspects of the broken covenant.

The Great Restoration

The way to restoration is expressed in "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." (*Joel* 2.13) and the Lord's promise, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" (*Joel* 2.28). When the great covenant was to be restored, the Earth was to regain its fertility, and the people of God were to be saved from the evil forces which had broken the cosmic covenant (*Joel* 3). It was this passage in *Joel* which inspired Peter's great Pentecost sermon (*Acts* 2.14-36). This shows that the giving of the Spirit and the birth of the Church were closely bound up with the vision of a



The Tree that brought about Man's Fall is also the source of his Redemption. The Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man by Giovanni da Modena, 15th century

Knowing the secrets of Creation, they came down from Heaven and taught them to humankind. A later version says that beautiful adorned women lured still more angels to them.

According to *The Book of Enoch*, the rebel angels, or 'watchers', "took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments... They became pregnant, and they bore great giants, who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, 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 laid accusation against the lawless ones." (VII.1)

"Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals (of the earth) and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray and became corrupt in all their ways." (VIII.1)

In doing this, they violated powerful taboos, and hence committed the most heinous cosmic sins – including, as we

renewal of the cosmic covenant; the restoration of all Creation. The apocalyptic tradition, which was the mother of Christianity, preserved the idea of the cosmic covenant, the judgement, and the great renewal.

The binding of evil also has a place in the New Testament. Casting out demons requires that the Strong One be bound first (*Matt.* 12.29). In *Revelation* 20.1-16, St. John saw how the Strong One (Azazel) was bound for a thousand years, so that the Earth could enjoy the Millennium Kingdom – Eden restored. Peter, having recognised Jesus as the Messiah, is given the power to bind and to loose, both in Heaven and on Earth (*Matt.* 16.13-19). The most likely explanation of Peter's commission is that he was given power over the evil ones (*Luke* 10.17, where demons are subjected in Jesus' name – note the role of the *name* in the task of binding).

The power given to Peter (symbolised by the keys of the kingdom of Heaven which now form the papal coat of arms) was later interpreted as the power to bind and loose sins, the power to absolve. The roots of the idea, however, lie not in forgiving the sin committed by human beings, but in protecting them from evil done to them. The binding was the restraining of evil forces.

In Enoch's *Book of the Watchers*, the evil forces are described in an amazingly realistic manner. He tells of the revolt of 200 powerful angels led by Azazel and Semihazah.

have seen, just what we are doing today on an ever greater scale. They wilfully destroyed the natural order by extracting metals from the bowels of the Earth to develop technological instruments of war and of seduction. The fallen angels are incarnate in our self-serving political and corporate leaders, who are blind to their real obligations to Heaven and to Earth, and who still persist in oppressing and denaturing God's Creation – very significantly, they were made blind.

In his vision, Enoch saw the Son of Man restoring the great bonds of creation, healing the rift between Earth and Heaven, and thus restoring the cosmos.

The miracle of healing in *John* 9 shows how deeply this world-view permeates the Gospels. A man had been born blind, not because of any sin, but so that the power of God could be shown. Jesus healed him. Jesus asked the blind man if he believed in the Son of Man. Why should Jesus have asked about the Son of Man when there had been a healing of blindness? If we read the Fourth Gospel in the light of Enoch, we realise that the ending of blindness was a sign that the power of evil was being broken and the cosmic covenant was being restored. This was the true role of the Son of Man. □

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Sacred Cosmology in the Christian Tradition

By Vincent Rossi

"Where is the life we have lost in living; where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge; where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" – T. S. Eliot

These three poignant questions, penned by T. S. Eliot over a half-century ago, point us directly at the problem of the Christian view of the Creation as we face the new millennium. The Christian conscience has lost its ancient wisdom, and needs to recover it, as an essential and indispensable part of its life.

The Recovery of Christian Cosmology

Many people today are calling for modern religion, and specifically Christianity, to be re-embedded 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. A study of the roots of the living Christian tradition reveals that the sense of 'embeddedness' in Creation was a very real part of the overall experience of the religion. The early Church, especially in its Greek or Eastern half, but also in the West, transmitted a fully 'cosmic' faith.

"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult, and left untried." – G. K. Chesterton

The great saints and sages of the early Church, in their writings, implicitly recognise a fundamental truth, as expressed by G. K. Chesterton: "Religion is not the church a man goes to but the cosmos he lives in." Chesterton also observed pointedly that "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult, and left untried."¹ The point of this observation applies as much to the role of Christianity in re-linking the Christian to Creation as it does to the more individualistic concerns relative to the salvation of the soul. Indeed, taken to its fullest meaning, the cosmic dimension so characteristic of Eastern Christianity implies that the salvation of the Christian's soul is directly linked to the manner in which he or she responds to Creation. Far from being 'anthropocentric', the Orthodox Christian Tradition, throughout its 2,000 year history presents a world-view that is 'theoanthropocosmic'.²

Religion's Divorce from the Cosmos

If this 'God-, Man- and Cosmos-centred' world-view was so central to the early Church, how did we lose sight of it? While it is not the purpose of this article to rehearse the question of how Western religion got itself divorced from the cosmos, we cannot avoid touching upon it, however briefly.

The root of the ecological crisis, according to Philip Sherard, is ultimately theological. More specifically, it is a theolog-



Easter Service in a Russian Orthodox Church in Zagorsk

ical interpretation of the relationship between God and Creation that separates the created order from the Divine reality in such a way as to remove from Creation all spiritual value and leave only material processes and 'resources' to be exploited.

The path towards the recovering of the integrity of Creation has been laid out in a number of significant statements from the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, of which the following is a good example:

"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



Madonna with Child surrounded by Dionysius the Areopagite to her right and Thomas Aquinas to her left. By Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1483

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."³

What I wish to suggest in this article is a way to recover the lost cosmic dimension of religion by showing how it might be found again in the Christian tradition. 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. In the words of 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 a 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.”⁴

Man's Divorce from Nature

If the root of this alienation of human nature from the natural order is theological, its tragic fruit has penetrated deeply into all aspects of modern society – political, economic, social, cultural and individual. But it is extremely difficult not to envisage even positive activities in terms that remain separating, alienating and abstracting. By the term ‘environment’ we usually mean ‘the natural world’, or, to use religious language, ‘Creation’. But if we look critically at the word ‘environment’, we will sense a certain abstract quality to it. It separates human nature from non-human nature, and turns non-human nature into an abstraction – something which we believe can be manipulated and controlled for our purposes.

Even with the best of intentions, we have created and are sustaining, a division between the natural world and ourselves – a

division that is at the very root of all environmental problems.

As Wendell Berry, poet, essayist and farmer, writes:

"Abstraction, of course, is what is wrong. The evil of the industrial economy (capitalist or communist) is the abstractness inherent in its procedures – its inability to distinguish one place or person or creature from another.

The right scale in work gives power to affection. When one works beyond the reach of one's love for the place one is working in and for the creatures one is working with and among, then destruction inevitably results. An adequate local culture, among other things, keeps work within the reach of love.

The question before us, then, is an extremely difficult one: How do we begin to remake ...what will preserve our part of the world while we use it? We are talking not just about a kind of knowledge that involves affection but also about a kind of knowledge that comes from or with affection – knowledge... that is unavailable to anyone in the form of 'information'."

The Original Christian World-view

A study of the lives and writings of the great spiritual masters of the First Millennium of the Christian Church – East and West – will show that a sacred cosmology was integral to the Church's world-view. Salvation, or deification, as the ancient Church and the Orthodox Church of today calls the process of reconciliation with God, was cosmic as well as personal in scope. It included not only human beings but also everything else in the universe, through the reciprocal relationship of the human microcosm with the macrocosm of the created order.

The self-understanding of the ancient Church – the united Christian faith of the first thousand years – shows a complex and subtle relationship between Church and cosmos. For the sacred cosmology of the early Church – the traces or vestiges of which still can be found in the Orthodox Church today – showed that not only was the Church imbedded in the cosmos, but that *the cosmos was imbedded in the Church*.

St. Maximos the Confessor describes the teaching of his own spiritual master (to whom he refers as "the great elder") on the Church:

"On a second level of contemplation, he [the great elder] used to speak of God's Holy Church as a figure and image [*ikon*] of the entire cosmos, composed of visible and invisible essences, because, like it, it contains unity and diversity... in this way the entire world of beings produced by God in creation is divided into a spiritual world filled with intelligible and incorporeal essences and into this sensible and bodily world which is ingeniously woven together of many forms and natures."

In the new order inaugurated by the Incarnation of Christ, the Church is the new cosmos. The Church is the Body of Christ, which is the new creation. As such, the Church is the *destiny* of the cosmos. The Church is the cosmos becoming itself, what it truly is to be – its end – as intended by God. The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ, which is the reconciliation, unification and glorification, not only of human beings, but of all things in the universe.

But how can this knowledge become an effective force for protecting God's Creation? This challenge is a form of asking how the knowledge of a cosmically-enlightened ancient tradition actually gives believers the power to transform our world. How, in short, in the Christian tradition does information become knowledge, become wisdom, become transfigured life? The answer to that challenge lies in the nature and method of Christian spiritual practice. The art of Christian Creation-keeping is an aspect of the Christian spiritual way.

Logos and Creation

The fundamental cosmic intuition of the Christian spiritual path is that creation is the manifestation of an order that at one and the same time transcends it, sustains it from within and manifests itself through it. This intrinsic, transcendent, immanent order is the *Logos* – the eternal son of God. The term 'Logos' in Christian theology marries, through the revelation of St. John's Gospel and the Epistles of Paul, its Greek philosophical meaning of an all-encompassing rational order uniting nature, society, individual humans and divinity into 'a great cosmos'⁵ with the Christian theological meaning of Christ, the Word (*Logos*) of God, in, through and by whom all things are created and "in whom we live and move and have our being" (*Acts* 17:28). It is thus the supreme ordering principle uniting all levels of being, from the sublimity of the Divine to the deepest density of the mineral kingdom.

According to three great Christian masters of cosmological vision, St. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373), Dionysius the Areopagite (circa 500) and Maximos the Confessor (580-662), the reciprocal imbeddedness of cosmos and Church is grounded in the primordial imbeddedness of all creation in God.

St. Ephrem the Syrian

St. Ephrem the Syrian was a great theologian, and one of the greatest writers in the Syriac language, as the following excerpt from one of his hymns shows.

*"As the water surrounds the fish and it 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 ..."*

Ephrem here represents God as the water, and all creatures as sea creatures. Just like the sea, God both contains and transcends his creatures. He is not only over all things, but also in and around and embracing all things. The separation implied in Divine transcendence never nullifies the unity implied in Divine immanence.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite

St. Dionysius the Areopagite lived in the late fifth or early sixth century. He was a great Christian neoplatonic philosopher, ascetic and speculative genius. Dionysius completes the picture or world-image of the traditional Christian cosmology.⁶

His most important contribution is undoubtedly his concept of *hierarchy* in the cosmos. Dionysius is, as far as we know, the first person in literature ever to have used the word 'hierarchy'. He seems to have coined the term. This profoundly Orthodox Christian concept is vital for a conception of the cosmos that includes not only the beings and activities of the visible world but also the 'invisible' world; beings and activity of the subtle, celestial or angelic worlds, not susceptible of scientific measurement, yet part of the order of created nature.

"A hierarchy is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the Divine."⁷ What does Dionysius mean by "approximating as closely as possible to the Divine"? His very next sentence gives the explanation: "It is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the enlightenments divinely given to it."

According to Dionysius, then, the order, understanding and activity of the hierarchically-ordered cosmos is the sanctifying beauty of the Divine image, revealed simultaneously in the being, in the knowing of and in the activity of the hierarchy. A hierarchy, then, contrary to the popular Church notion, is not a 'chain of command'; or an organisational chart representing a system of authority that is imposed from above upon a mass of individuals who are not part of the authority structure. To Dionysius, the sacred concept of hierarchy applied not only to the world of angels but to the world of visible nature. To quote from his treatise on the Church, the priesthood and the sacraments, *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 one of its sacred constituents. Talk of 'hierarchy' and one is referring to a holy and inspired man, someone who understands all sacred knowledge, someone in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known."⁸

In other words, the created order itself – the universe – in the Dionysian conception, is a God-given means of fulfilment, salvation and transfiguration for all its constituent parts or members. This is to say that human beings cannot be 'saved' without 'saving' the Creation. In Orthodox Christian terms, without the transfiguration of the cosmos, there is no 'deification' of human beings. Central to this, is the crucial insight that the purpose of the created order is "to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with Him." In the understanding of the ancient Church, the universe, far from being either an illusion or a vast mindless material force, is a Divine revelation and a sacred means of salvation, enlightenment and 'at-one-ment'.

St. Maximos the Confessor

1,400 years ago, St. Maximos the Confessor (580-662) brought the 'Logos' paradigm to new heights, creating an unsurpassed synthesis showing that all are representatives of one simple and supreme principle, the Logos Principle which underlies the deep structure of the cosmos.

For Maximos, the perennial integrity paradigm of the cosmos was self-evident. It was the Church as the cosmic 'living symbol'; the house of all horizons and perspectives. The Logos is the eternal, which understands, explains and encompasses all. In the words of St. Paul: "In him, we live and move and have our being"(Acts 17:28)

The essence of this notion, which Maximos termed *diakosmesis* is this: all we know about humanity and all we know about the universe are reciprocal. This means that how we see the world depends upon how we see ourselves; and, equally, how we see ourselves depends upon how we see the world. The model we have of the universe depends upon our view of ourselves. This means that we live in a participatory universe of incorporeal and corporeal light where the observer and the observed are intertwined and interactive.

This principle is enshrined in *Genesis*, Chapter One, where we are taught that God made humanity in His own image and likeness as microcosm and mediator. The image is the perfection of all nature, and our nature as God intended; the likeness is the actual state of our nature; the distance between the image of nature – the way God made it – and the likeness of nature – what we have done with it – is the source of all disorder and disharmony in the world.

If there is dissonance in this liturgy, it stems from any par-

adigm of thought or action which enshrines the unnatural disorder and distance between the way things really are according to the Divine creative will; the end to which they are intended (teleology), and what we have made of them and the end to which we actually put them (economy/ecology). There is nothing in the principle of *diakosmesis* that is superseded by any technological development of the present, including computers and the 'information revolution' that would necessitate an all-out effort to find or declare a new paradigm.

St. Maximos, Liturgising the World

Let us consider the cosmological and ecological functions of liturgy: the act of liturgising the world. The word liturgy is from the Greek *leit-ourgos*, which literally means the 'work of the people'. The Byzantine Church of St. Maximos' time recognised liturgy as the *topos*, or place, of the direct link between human knowing and ethical action, with the well-being of the cosmos and the metaphysical transparency of things. The insight that the cosmos itself is a vast liturgy is a revelation of the cosmological dimension to the liturgy of the Church.

This *theoria* (contemplation), itself the fruit of natural contemplation (or *phusiki*, in Maximian terminology⁹), leads St. Maximos the Confessor to interpret the Divine Liturgy of the Byzantine Church as sacred cosmology in action. We can clearly see this conception fully expressed in St. Maximos' commentary on the Divine Liturgy, the *Mystagogia*. It starts with a section where he presents his image of the universe as a living symbol in which God, the Church, the cosmos, Holy Scripture and humanity are presented as icons – or reciprocal symbols – of one another. He then interprets the actions of the rite of the *synaxis* (or holy communion) in terms, not only of the life of Christ, but more specifically in relation to the goal of Creation, and most of all, in accordance with the ethical, ascetical, contemplative and mystical transformation of the human soul.

The third section is a contemplation that unites the human image, the image of the cosmos, and the Divine image in and through the Primordial Sacrifice of the Logos. Because the human image and the cosmic image are reciprocal in the thought of the Byzantine spiritual master, the inner constitution and condition of the human soul or microcosmos will be seen to have a direct effect on the outer condition and order of the universe or macrocosmos.

Clearly, St. Maximos understands liturgy to be the attainment of authentic being in knowledge and virtue, leading to 'knowledge', or the identity of knower and known in the experience of truth. This in return leads to 'love', or harmony of being and knowing and doing in Man and to peace (*hesychia*), or fulfilment of the destiny of Man, in which his deification or salvation and the transfiguration of nature are one and the same experience. To St. Maximos the Confessor, authentic liturgy is sacred cosmology in action. The field of the action is the human person as microcosmos, united reciprocally to the macrocosmos, the universe as a whole.

But even the cosmos as a whole is not seen as the spiritually empty universe of astrophysicists and evolutionists, but the universe understood liturgically and reciprocally as a Cosmic Man.¹¹ "The whole world, made up of visible and invisible things, is Man, and conversely... Man, made up of body and soul, is a world."

The action of liturgy is twofold: first, the reconstitution of ordinary space and time into liturgical space and time, wherein the valences of eternity are manifest, as Blake's "infinity in

a grain of sand and eternity in an hour." Second, the transfiguration of human nature by uniting mind, heart, will, soul and body into wholeness, which results in a person whose faculties are energised and orientated toward truth, goodness and beauty in self, neighbour and Earth. This cannot but result in a person capable of genuinely feeling the wrongness of the ongoing destruction of the environment.

Enlightened and empowered by liturgy, Mankind's true work in the world, such a person is thus capable as well of responding with ethical and practical effectiveness toward making the necessary sacrifice that will lead to healing and harmony in person and cosmos.

Liturgy, in its authentically Orthodox sense, is the transfiguration of nature (not just human nature but all nature) through the living symbolism of the sacramental act, which unites man and woman, this present world and paradise, earth and heaven, the sensible and intelligible dimensions of creation in its totality, and, ultimately, the Creation and the Uncreated.

In the conception of St. Maximos, which is the view of ancient traditional Christianity, the liturgy is the Divinely-ordained work of the people in which the essence of religion and science is fully embedded in the cosmos because the cosmos is fully embedded in God. Through such liturgy, both the universe as macrocosm and the individual human being as microcosm are transformed, transfigured and deified. This transfiguration and deification is the ultimate destiny of both cosmos and man. Liturgy as sacred cosmology in action is able to accomplish this because of its essence; the communication of and communion with the Archetypal Sacrifice; the very foundation of the universe.

The heart of liturgy is sacrifice, and the purpose of sacrifice is to make holy. Liturgy was conceived as the primary work of all people, and the field of this work was not merely the horizon of the individual soul, but the whole world. The Church was embedded in the cosmos, the cosmos in the Church. The Church's mission, through the Holy Spirit, was to bring about the reciprocal transfiguration of the cosmos and itself as the New Creation. The responsibility of people on the Earth was and is to liturgise the world, and by so doing, to heal divisions in an ecology of transfiguring light.

Clearly, restoration of sacred cosmology at the heart of Christian teaching, is the single most powerful step in an effective Christian effort to reverse the desecration of the cosmos in the next millennium. □

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9. Phusiki, or "natural contemplation" is a technical term in the Greek ascetic tradition. It means less the enjoyment of the beauties of nature than a rigorous noetic penetration into the "living symbols" that are all natural forms.

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The Cosmic Vision of Hildegard of Bingen

By Stephanie Roth

“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.” – Scivias 1.2.29



Hildegard of Bingen receiving illuminations from Heaven

Much could be written about her extraordinary life as Mother Superior of her convents at Bingen and Rupertsberg. The surviving collection of her correspondence reveals a powerful, courageous and compassionate personality. She produced major writings on theology, natural history and medicine, as well as composing music – including a symphony. At the impressive age of 60, she set off on the first of four successful preaching tours. All this is remarkable, especially when considering that she was a woman living at times when the divisions of the world had become increasingly apparent.

The Mystical Tradition

Just like ‘myth’ and ‘mysticism’, ‘mystic’ is rooted in the Greek verb *musteion*: to close the eyes or the mouth. Mystics tend to seek union with what is closest to their heart. Theistic mystics seek a union with God but not identity. In the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, a ‘mystery’ was known only to the initiated (mystes). In the New Testament this ‘mystery’ is the revelation of the word of God.

Amongst the various types of mystic, there are those to whom nature represents a supreme truth and the strongest evidence of God’s existence. This universal phenomenon can be

found amongst Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Greek and Russian Orthodox – mystics, ranging as far as Chinese Taoists and Japanese Shintos. It is to this ‘school’ of mysticism that Hildegard of Bingen belongs.

Hildegard’s Natural Vision

Hildegard saw the notion of ‘Viriditas’, or Greenness, penetrating every aspect of life. This ‘Greenness’ was the very expression of Divine power on Earth. “The Word of God regulates the movements of the Sun, the Moon and the stars. The Word of God gives the light which shines from the heavenly bodies. He makes the wind blow, the rivers run and the rain fall. He makes trees burst into blossom, and the crops bring forth the harvest.”

Since this extraordinary phenomenon called *life* could only be created by God, Hildegard believed, all that *lives* equally carried his Divine energy, or ‘viritas’. In her own words:

*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 all together
From you clouds flow, air flies,
Rocks have their humours,
Rivers spring forth from the waters
And earth wears her green vigour
O ignis Spiritus Paracliti*

This is the foundation upon which all her texts rest, whether songs, visions or natural observations.

Hildegard believed that humanity, made in God’s image, was the ‘recapitulation’ of Creation. This has various implications. Firstly, Man was made *after* Creation, hence the world was *not* created for humankind alone. To be precise, humankind was created last in a set order, and so was inserted into an already self-sustaining environment. It is for this reason that humanity depends upon the world as a whole. Secondly, Creation and humankind are both made of the same thing – dust.² Because Man was made last, he unites the powers and properties of Creation. He therefore *instinctively* knows the limits of trespassing. Thirdly, humankind’s very purpose is to glorify Creation in the name of the Lord. This entails looking after it.

To quote Hildegard: “God created the world out of the four

elements, to glorify His name. He strengthened the world with the wind. He connected the world to the stars. 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.”⁷³

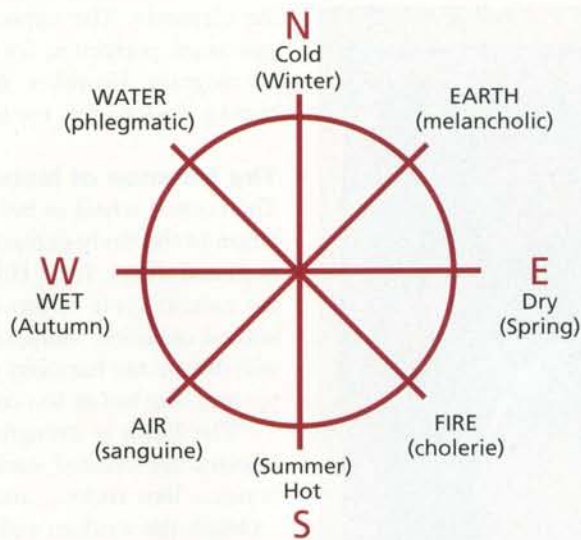
To quote her again: “The rest of Creation cries out against the evil and perversity of the human species. Other creatures fulfil the commandments of God; they honour his laws. And other creatures do not grumble and complain at those laws. But human beings rebel against those laws, defying them in word and action. And in doing so they inflict terrible cruelty on the rest of God’s creation.”⁷⁴

The image of Man being the steward of Creation, but dishonouring his position by defying the sacred order, presupposes an agreement between Man and a greater legislator – God. During Creation, God blessed Nature (*Gen. 1:22*) and Mankind (*Gen. 1:28*). Prior to the Great Covenant, God blessed Noah. A blessing is to ‘make it holy’ by endowing a talent and protecting it. All these examples imply a relationship based on agreement. This was made in the first part of *Gen. 1:22* and *Gen. 1:28* through the act of blessing; through the laying-on of hands. It is within this context that the second part of *Gen. 1:22* and *Gen. 1:28* reveal their meaning. *Gen. 1* time and again affirms how ‘good’ God felt about his Creation – why then would he want to destroy it?

God, then, made Creation and “saw that it was good.” It was so good, in fact, that he wanted someone capable of admiring and appreciating it. This is when he created Man and why he endowed him with reason. But the ability to reason made Man desire to be wiser than God; to improve his already perfect situation. Gaining this forbidden wisdom meant breaking a sacred agreement; Man did so, and still does. Christ, the Word of God, in “whom all things are made” was the living example of how to restrain evil forces and restore the sacred agreement between Man and God. This is the promise of Salvation; “on Earth as it is in Heaven”.

Hildegard as Artist

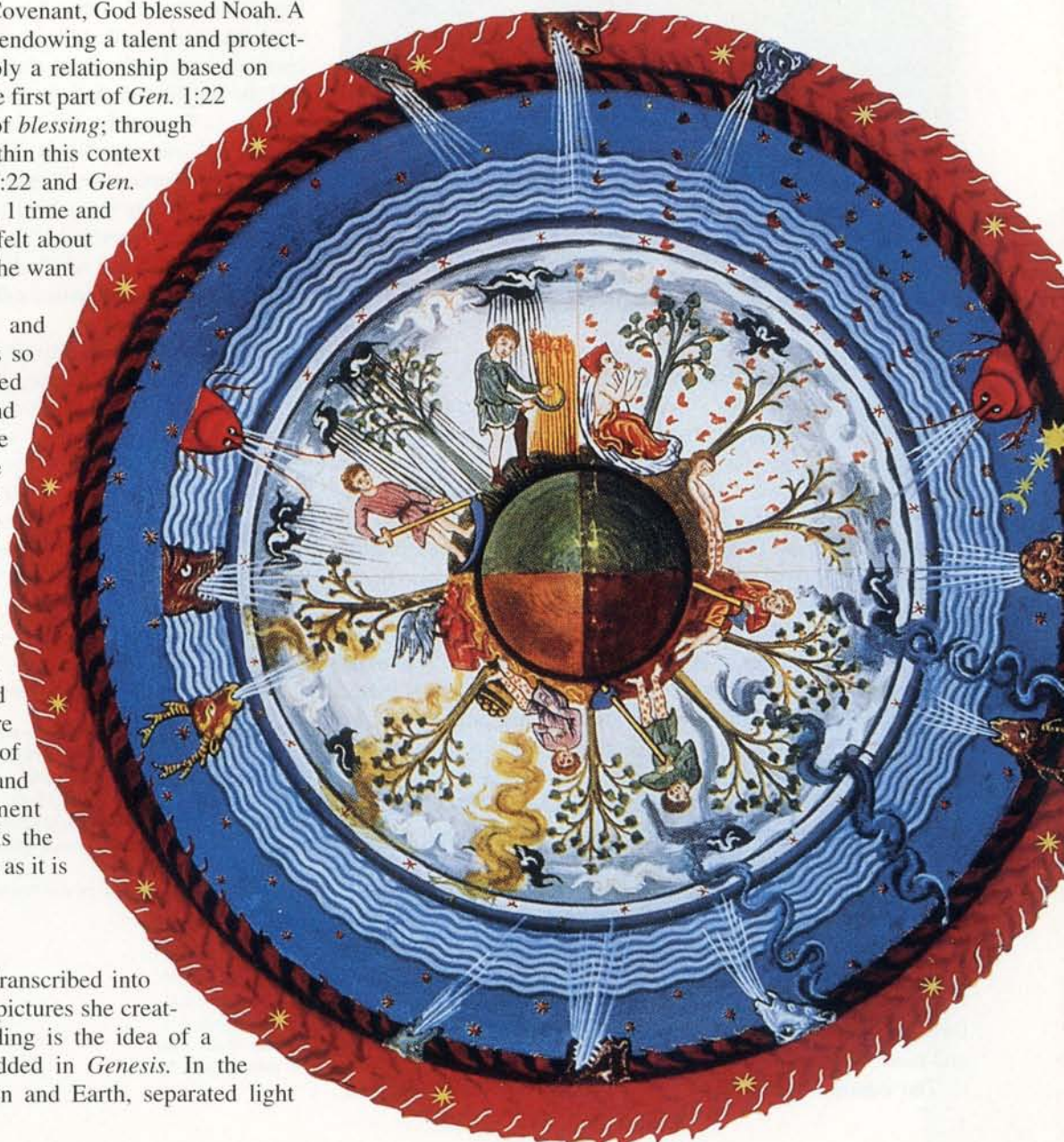
Hildegard’s visions were also transcribed into visual art, in the mandalas and pictures she created. Central to their understanding is the idea of a ‘cosmic equilibrium’ as embedded in *Genesis*. In the beginning, God created Heaven and Earth, separated light



from darkness, Earth from water, man from woman – and he saw that it was good. It was good because it worked, and it worked because, in their natural and eternal alliance, opposites are drawn to the Centre.

Their descriptive relation to this ‘Centre’ is most easily represented by two crosses; one diagonal and one upright (see diagram, left). According to the cosmologists of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the eternal characteristics of the world – the four elements (fire, air, water and earth), with the corresponding four temperaments (choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic); and the four qualities (dry, hot, wet and cold) with the corresponding seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter) – meet in one cross.

To Hildegard all life is interconnected and without beginning or end. Her mandala on ‘The celestial influence on men, animals and plants’ depicts the harmonious relationship between man and nature according to Cosmic Law



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'All these animals heads breathe towards the wheel and human figure. It is these winds that maintain the whole universe as well as humanity in which all creation is shared so that nothing becomes subject to destruction.' The relationship of man as microcosm and the universe as macrocosm; miniature from 'Codex Latinus', Lucca, Biblioteca Statale, 13th century

Thus to the Church Fathers, the divine nature of Christ, the Incarnation was already a sacrifice. In its self-lowering, the divine nature took upon itself the cross of the world that is compounded by opposites. The actual crucifixion appears as the inevitable outward result of the Incarnation; and at the same time the inward victory over it.⁵

All of Hildegard's visionary compositions embrace the concept of 'cosmic law', but the *Liber Divinorum Operum* (Book of Divine Works) does so best. The colour circles and animals, framing the mandalas, symbolise God's eternal order, and their attributed qualities match the cosmic law. A circle of luminous red represents fire. It embraces all others and illuminates them. The following symbolises Black fire for the punishment of evildoers. The next is ether, indicating pure atonement. Beneath comes a zone of watery air, symbolising the holy works of righteous individuals. It represents water. Closest to the centre is a sphere of clear air; indicating moderation. The centre represents the element of earth.

The animal heads, representing the characters which match the elements,⁶ uphold the equilibrium by their breathing. "It is these winds which keep the universe in balance... and which keep human beings aware of salvation."⁷ "All six circles are bound to each other... If the divine had not strengthened them through such an association, the firmament would come apart and have no stability."⁸

The equilibrium is further held together by the binding of

the elements. The opposites result in a harmonious order to guarantee perfection for whatever is central to the particular cosmogram. However, the centre plays a vital part in maintaining the balance; the relationship is reciprocal.

The Balance of Nature

The cosmic wheel in her fourth vision, entitled *On the Articulation of the Body* explains the celestial influence on Men, animals and plants. Here Hildegard shows Man's activities within the natural cycle of the seasons, again corresponding to their natural qualities, temperaments and elements. If Man sins, he will disrupt the harmony of the cosmos. Nature will be too dry, too wet, too hot or too cold.

"The Earth is strengthened by rocks and trees. Like it, we humans are created because our flesh is like the Earth; our bones... like rocks... and... trees."⁹ And she adds: "the just embrace the wisdom and know what is living"¹⁰ and "Because of such considerations, humanity should regard almighty God as a seal and recognise all the divine wonders and symbols."¹¹

The second vision, entitled *On the Construction of the World*, describes the human body and soul as a microcosm, repeating the divine plan and the natural world in miniature. Man as microcosm is at the centre of Creation, with which he shares a special relationship. "The ball in the midst of the circle... represents Earth... such a ball, which is round and rotating, most resembles that form of the world in all its details. It is maintained on all sides by these circles, is tied to them, and receives constantly from them the greening freshness of life and the fertility needed for the Earth's support."¹²

Man is framed by the elements in the traditional manner, except for one significant difference: "The figure in whose breast the cosmic wheel appears is the source of true love in whose knowledge the wheel rests. And this order... preserves and nourishes everything."¹³ The head on top represents the Godhead, the source of Divine Love. The feet of "true love" represent thrones of justice and righteousness that support the universe.

Through the act of *blessing*, God infused Humankind and Creation with Divine Love, thus established his 'covenant'. Righteousness and justice are its guarantors. Christ, the Son of God, the 'second Adam', re-established this oath, which, according to Hildegard, involved the protection of nature. "Those who trust in God will also honour the stability of the world: the orbits of the Sun and the Moon, winds and air, earth and water... We have no other foothold. If we give up this world we shall be destroyed by demons and deprived of the angels' protection."¹⁴ □

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An African Church sets the example

By Edward Echlin

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as in heaven" – (Mt. 6:10)

On Earth as in heaven – so God's kingdom includes this Earth. Evangelism, therefore, is about more than soul salvation. Christians, under God, share in a responsibility for God's Earth. We serve God best when we exercise our responsibilities locally, healing our fellow creatures within our damaged Earth community and kneeling with them in the praise of God. This is what W. H. Auden meant when he said, "When kings were local, people knelt."

Evangelism is more than words. In Zimbabwe, at Baptism, adults in the African Independent Churches (AIC) confess 'ecological sins' – and commit themselves to continue Christ's ministry by *healing* the Earth in their locality. The water used in Baptism, symbolically 'the Jordan', is drunk or returned to the Earth, preferably near an indigenous

broadleaf or fruit tree. Bishop Darkai Ndonga of Zimbabwe's Zion Christian Church says, "The church is the keeper of Creation".

The Zimbabwean Christians recognise that Earth abuse is sinful and demand repentance. At the Eucharist, the African Independent Churches 'call to mind' ecological sins. In local tree-planting Eucharists, they 'clothe' the Body of Christ, in Whom "All things hold together" (Col. 1:17) After the liturgy, local seedlings are planted in a 'God's acre' previously prepared and blessed by leaders. Tree planting Eucharists include aftercare: regular watering of young trees and nurture.

In our own urban ecosystems, where many, including Christians, are incapacitated in their inability to relate to wildlife, to habitats, to living trees and plants, our evangelism must include teaching, in word and example, about ecological sin and Earth healing. We can

improve our evangelism by contemplating the African Independent Church's beautiful tree-planting prayer:

*Our planting of trees today
Is a sign of harmony
Between us and Creation.*

*We are reconciled with Creation
Through the body and blood of Jesus
Which brings peace,
He who came to save
All Creation.*

An Earth-healing evangelism in our exploited north-west Europe, in communion with the evangelism of the African Independent Church in their exploited bio-region, would extend into a truly ecological millennium. □

Dr. Edward P. Echlin writes and lectures on Christian Theology & Ecology and is a Honorary Research Fellow in Ecological Theology at University College of Trinity & All Saints, Leeds.



Ceremony around a sacred tree by Gerard Valcin, 1963

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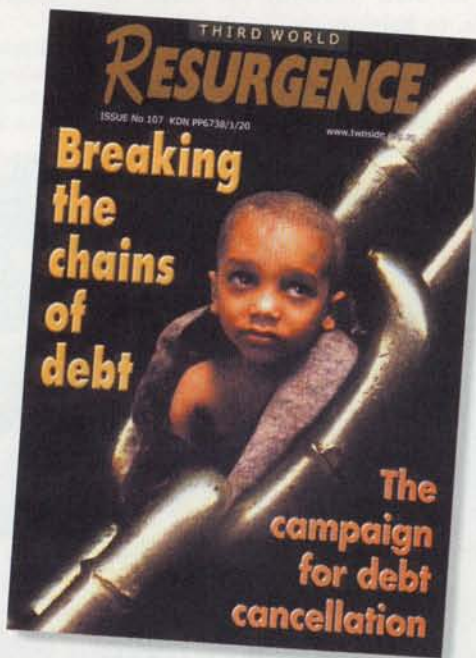
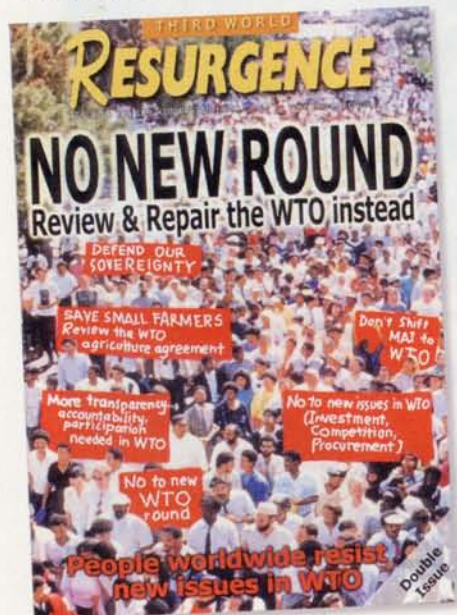
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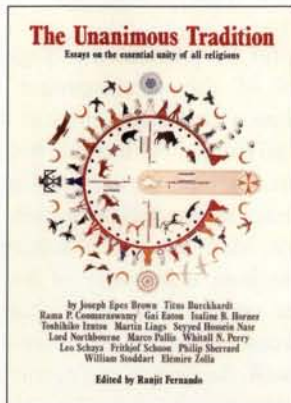
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Reviews

All Are One



THE UNANIMOUS TRADITION: ESSAYS ON THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF ALL RELIGIONS

Ed. Ranjit Fernando,

Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional
Studies, 241pp.

£48/\$75 (hb), £19.95/\$29.95 (pb),
ISBN 955 9028 03 0.

On the face of it, one might suppose that a volume of essays on religion would not figure high on a list of reading priorities for those concerned with the nature and extent of the environmental catastrophe that now confronts us. Such a mistaken judgement would, however, rob the potential reader of an opportunity to be guided to the deeper reasons why Man finds himself locked in combat with nature, and why his least actions seem inescapably to underwrite the concept of nature as an external commodity subject to human exploitation and manipulation. Man is at war with nature because he is at war with himself. But who is Man? The answer to this most primordial question is unlikely to emerge from the pages of the mainstream 'Green Press'.

Each of the 16 contributors to this distinguished volume writes from the standpoint of the 'Perennial Philosophy'. None of them has a 'personal' point of view or philosophy to espouse – indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the collection as a whole is the underlying unanimity of its various contributions, despite the vast range of subject matter, which includes such aspects of traditional societies as their arts and their sciences. This unanimity is rooted in the

transcendent principles that are the essence of all intrinsically orthodox religions, for almost all the authors belong to what is now known as the 'traditionalist school', with its origins in the writings of René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and, later, Frithjof Schuon.

The short essay by Schuon is a succinct and masterly précis of what is meant by the term Perennial Philosophy – also known as the *religio* or *sophia perennis*. But, for those unfamiliar with traditionalist thinking, it would perhaps be best to quote the following from Whitall Perry's introductory essay:

"Tradition is the continuity of Revelation: an uninterrupted transmission, through innumerable generations, of the spiritual and cosmological principles, sciences and laws resulting from a revealed religion: nothing is neglected, from the establishment of social orders

Man is at war with nature because he is at war with himself. But who is Man? The answer to this most primordial question is unlikely to emerge from the pages of the mainstream 'Green Press'.

and codes of conduct to the canons regulating the arts and architecture, ornamentation and dress; it includes the mathematical, physical, medical and psychological sciences, encompassing moreover those deriving from celestial movements. What contrasts it totally with our modern learning, which is a closed system materially, is its reference to all things back to superior planes of being, and eventually to ultimate Principles: considerations entirely unknown to modern man."

By contrast, much modern thought seeks always to evolve and elaborate on the plane of the relative and the contingent. It is preoccupied with hypothetical origins and conjectural future ends. Its dominant linear mode, for instance, gives little thought to what might result from a course of action that abuses the sources of life. It separates things: Man, Nature and God, for instance, are treated, to all intents and purposes, as belonging to different, even at times opposed, categories of thought and being.

In traditional thought, where the principle of multiplicity is the Divine Oneness of Reality, Man and Nature are envisaged as epiphanic modes of the Divine. Marco Pallis, in his essay, points to the parallel between the Buddhist and Christian views of phenomenal reality and reminds us that every minute particular of the Creation may serve providentially to reveal the "all-embracing suchness of the Real..." The modern mentality, secular and quantitative, is predisposed, on the other hand, to see nature as external matter, something apart and different from the human. Therefore, modern Man's actions towards nature are preconditioned to result in its exploitation and destruction.

In ancient thought, there is the discernment and recognition of the distinction between *natura naturans* (creative nature), the principle of outward creation, and *natura naturata* (created

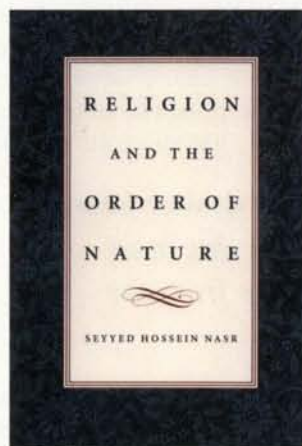
nature), in which the substance and particularity of the creation is like an indefinite multiplicity of mirrors that reflect a single source of light. Modern thought, lacking the means to make such a distinction, seeks to account for created nature by means of precedent material causes, and is obliged to look for the origin of things in a continually regressive earlier stage of development of the material creation, as if the beginning of time could ever be accounted for by recourse to history! In the irrationality of its denial of the supra-rational, it reduces reality to what can be measured and weighed, and, as a consequence, life is lived at the level of the senses and the abstractions of thought that we extrapolate from them. All human betterment is seen in terms of the exercise and gratification of egoistic appetites, that being the principle of consumerism.

For those who are seeking an understanding of the precise nature of the crisis that now surrounds us, and who wish to weigh in the balance the achievements

and shortcomings of the present age, the richness of possibilities offered in this book may be the pivotal point they are looking for. Further manipulation of our present situation carried out solely upon the basis of knowledge drawn from the situation itself will clearly fail, as it has consistently failed already, to give us the bearing needed to navigate ourselves into less turbulent waters. It is only by the terms of a universal and illuminative metaphysic that, finally, the contingencies of time and place can be objectively evaluated. As Elémire Zolla in his essay suggests, "the industrial society will founder or be obliged to seek a formula, not of perpetual growth but, as in all normal epochs, of enduring harmonies." It is these enduring harmonies which *The Unanimous Tradition* holds up for our contemplation. —*Brian Keeble*

Brian Keeble is a writer, publisher and Co-editor of the journal *Temenos*.

Fall of Man



RELIGION AND THE ORDER OF NATURE

by *Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996,
310pp, £15.50, ISBN 0-19-510823-X

Humanity, writes Professor Nasr in this book, is no longer in harmony with Heaven and is therefore in constant strife with the terrestrial environment (p.3). In eight tightly-packed chapters, each furnished with copious notes and a bibliography, he shows how Western thought moved away from the idea that nature was sacred, and came to see it rather as something to be used and exploited by humans. This modern view, which originated in the West, has now spread worldwide and is responsible for destruction of the environment on a global scale. Human beings without the restraint of religion – any religion – have had devastating consequences for both

civilisation and the world of nature.

It used to be fashionable for Christian theologians to claim that Christianity alone had permitted a secular science to develop, free of the constraints of archaic superstition. Even recent developments in so-called eco-theology have been concerned more with environmental ethics than with rediscovering the sacredness of nature's 'cosmic reality' (p.5). Science has declared what questions should be asked and then asserted that these are the only questions that can be asked.

Professor Nasr begins the main part of the book by surveying what has been taught about the order of nature by many religions: shamanism, Egyptian religion, the traditions of the Far East, Indo-Iranian and European religions and those of the children of Abraham. Though necessarily brief, given the vast sweep of materials surveyed, this is as good an introduction as I know to such an important area of thought, and would in itself commend the book. Traditional religions, he concludes, all agree that nature is sacred and has a purpose, and that the human order is inextricably bound up with that of nature.

Since the current understanding of nature, both religious and anti-, cannot be understood without a knowledge of Western philosophy, Chapter Three shows how Western philosophy abandoned its ancient devotion to 'wisdom' and limited itself to empiricism and rationalism. Such a discipline would be better named misosophy; hatred of wisdom, he says, since it shows none of the love for wisdom that the name philosophy implies. The thesis is demonstrated by a survey of Greek, medieval and finally post-renaissance thought. He pleads for a return to the philosophia perennis and for a rediscovery of the traditional philosophy of the West which has become no more than a matter of historical interest.

Chapter Four shows how the traditional sciences shared their world-view with the religion which shaped the culture in which they arose. Modern science in the West, it is argued, has all but destroyed the traditional sciences, relegating them "at best to the margin of intellectual activity", (p.127) and itself lives at odds with the religious world-view it has all but destroyed. "Through the destruction of the unitary vision of the cosmos, the laws of nature became divorced from moral laws..." (p.129). Professor Nasr traces the consequences of "the mechanisation of the world pic-

ture in the Renaissance", of "the quantification of nature in the eighteenth century", of the Darwinian and post-Darwinian movement, and of modern physics. He pleads for a return to a science "rooted in the religious understanding of reality" (p.153) with religion having rediscovered its ancient wisdom, so that the spiritual life of humans and the whole order of nature do not perish together.

Chapter Five traces the tragic consequences of the development of that humanism which made humans the measure of all things. No longer 'half-angel', what traditional Western religion had recognised as the fallen human became the norm. Man was part of nature insofar as he became a prisoner of his senses, and free only in the sense that he was freed from any sense of cosmic law or divine will. Autonomous reason and sensory perception became the sole criteria for verification of true knowledge. Modern Man is Promethean Man.

Chapter Six begins with a valuable survey of modern Christian responses to the environmental crisis. Professor Nasr observes that modern Christian responses to the environmental crisis have not drawn on those Christian traditions that have in the past developed doctrines concerning nature. Those who do draw on them are no longer identified as Christian theologians but, for example, as theosophists. There are also surveys of modern Jewish responses and the reaction of some non-Western religions to the environmental crisis. These latter have had Western values forced upon them in the guise of development and becoming part of the global economic order.

Chapter Seven is a fascinating exploration of attitudes towards the human body, which has been shorn of its mystery. Recent developments in medical exploration have created a major crisis but there has also been a rediscovery of the sacredness of the body with the trend towards alternative and holistic therapies. There is a sketch of attitudes to the body in many traditions: primal religions, Indian, religions, Christianity, Islam at the bridge of East and West, and finally the rediscovery of the body in the New Age, and the return to meditation even in mainstream Christianity. Professor Nasr concludes: "The scientific study of the human body has taught mankind a great deal about its functioning but has also veiled much of its reality" (p.259).

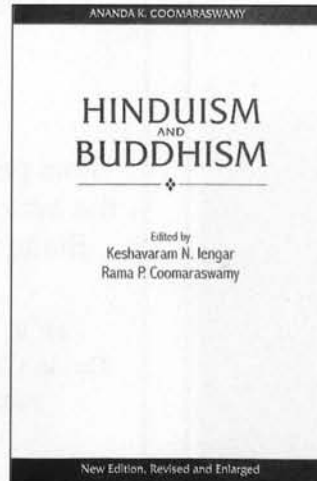
The book concludes with thoughts on

“religion and the resacralisation of nature”. Fallen humans need to regain contact with the vision of Eden they have lost, and this means, in the West, recovering many of the beliefs which were distorted and even buried by centuries of secular philosophy and its sciences. Beyond all the various expressions of religion there lies a common awareness of the cosmos, and only through revelation can the individual be aware of his being joined to the greater whole. Sacred rites, which express and promote cosmic harmony, are to be valued; the person who has penetrated into the spiritual world can truly influence the natural world. The Gaia hypothesis could be expanded and enriched by an awareness of the Logos. Humans need to be reborn as guardians of the sacred (p.287).

This is a magnificent book, pleading for a return to metaphysics, the knowledge of what is behind and beyond nature. One sentence in the first chapter encapsulates the substance of the book: “The world is thus a veil that at once hides and reveals the realities beyond, being at once the shutter that hides the light of the inner or noumenal world, and the opening into that world thanks to its symbolic nature and the inner reality of which every outward reality is the outward” (p.15). Professor Nasr at this point is drawing on the traditions of the Sufis, but Christian theologians will recognise this immediately as the doctrine of the Incarnation – in the words of Charles Wesley, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see.”

As I read this book, coming as I do from the traditional discipline of biblical studies, I realised just how much can be drawn from the temple traditions of Judaism which passed into Christianity. All the symbolism of the temple veil which hid the light of the divine presence in the creation, the structure of the temple itself as a microcosm of the Creation with the invisible world veiled in its midst, the high priest as the one who passed through the veil into the divine presence and, above all, the description of Jesus as the great high priest. Christian theologians have been very slow to engage with the problems posed by the environmental crisis, not least because they have all too often lost touch with the very materials which could best help them in their task. There is a need for them to search deep within the foundations of their tradition to uncover treasures similar to those Professor Nasr has collected in this fascinating and important volume. – *Margaret Barker*

In Search of Perennial Truths



HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy,
Ed. Keshavaram N. Iengar
and Rama P. Coomaraswamy.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, 1999,
108pp, \$12.50 including registered
airmail postage. Ordered via Vedams
Books, New Delhi, India
<www.vedamsbooks.com>

This new edition of the classical and celebrated work by A. K. Coomaraswamy is the eleventh to be published by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, which is planning to reprint the complete works of this great master of traditional doctrines. The present edition is the first to include the later revisions and additions made by the author, and must therefore be considered as the definitive edition of this seminal work, which became famous since its first edition saw the light of day in 1943. The book consists of the text of two lectures delivered the year before on the two great religions of India.

Hinduism and Buddhism is one of the last works of Coomaraswamy, and among his most significant. This was recognised by René Guénon who, in a review written in 1946 in *Les Etudes Traditionnelles*, referred to it as an “ouvrage important”. Like *Time and Eternity* and *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, which belong to the same period in the life of the author, *Hinduism and Buddhism* deals with the essence of the subject that it treats, and it does so from a purely traditional and metaphysical point of view.

The author looks upon Hinduism and Buddhism not from a historical point of view, but from the perspective of the

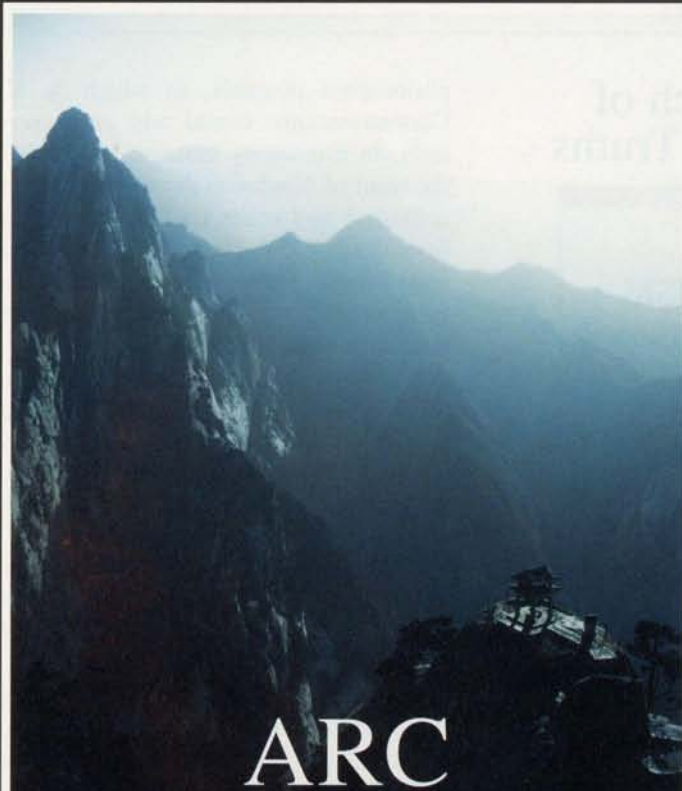
philosophia perennis, to which A. K. Coomaraswamy would add *et universalis*. In a masterly manner, he reaches the heart of Hinduism through the major scriptural and other traditional sources from the Rig Veda to the Vaisnava, Saiva and Tantric texts, and especially the Bhagavad Gita, and summarises the teachings of the tradition under the categories of myth, theology and anthology, the way of action and the social order. Coomaraswamy’s perspective is strictly metaphysical throughout, and he refutes many distorted ideas, including the popular understanding of reincarnation.

In the case of Buddhism, Coomaraswamy is more interested in the myth in the traditional sense at the heart of the religion rather than in its historic development. He sees Buddhism as the re-establishment of perennial truths, and shows its proximity to the teachings of the Upanishads. After examining specific teachings of Buddhism, such as the monastic regimen and dharma, which he equates with the charioteer of the chariot whose symbol is present in both the Upanishads and Buddhist texts, Coomaraswamy concludes that the Buddha, the Arhat, is none other than the spirit (atman) within all beings. To quote Kapila Vatsyayan in her foreword, the “Buddha thus is Brahma, Prajapati, Light of Lights, Fire or Sun, in short the first principle, and ultimately the realisation of Nirvana is the flight of the alone to the Alone and is the void that passeth to the Void.” (p.xiii).

This new edition is well printed, and includes, besides the foreword by Vatsyayan, a preface by Robert A. Strom, dealing with the reaction to this work after its appearance in 1943. We must all be grateful to K. N. Iengar and R. P. Coomaraswamy for their careful editing of this enlarged and definitive edition of one of the most important traditional studies of Hinduism and Buddhism. This truth holds, even if some of the followers of Buddhism were not pleased with the way that A. K. Coomaraswamy sought to show the profound metaphysical unity underlying the teachings of the two religions. All admirers of the works of A. K. Coomaraswamy must also be grateful to Kapila Vatsyayan and the Indira Gandhi Centre for making this and other precious works of the doctor available once again.

– *Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

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Since 1995, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) has been bringing together world religions and environmental action world-wide. We have worked with the World Wide Fund for Nature, UNESCO, the World Council of Churches, The China Taoist Association and countless individuals and organisations on projects which bring together environmental concern and religious conviction.

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- In China, ARC is working collaboratively with Buddhists, Taoists and government officials to protect China's sacred mountains;
- In India, ARC is working with the ancient Jagannath Temple of Puri helping develop a network of local activists dedicated to safeguarding the sacred rights of Jagannath in the forest of Orissa.
- In Britain, ARC is working with local communities, environmental & faith groups to protect ancient sites and develop new ones through the Sacred Land project.
- Internationally, ARC is working in partnership with WWF to encourage faith groups to take on significant new environmental projects through 'Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet' initiative. These 'Sacred Gifts' will be announced at a major celebration in Kathmandu, Nepal in November 2000.

For more information, please contact ARC,
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TEMENOS ACADEMY REVIEW

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Millennium Yews

In 1987, having become aware that many ancient Yew trees had been destroyed or were under threat, The Conservation Foundation began a campaign to gain protection for those remaining.

By encouraging people to measure their local Yew and provide details of its site, an estimate of the age of the tree was able to be made and recorded on a certificate displayed – often in the nearby church, to encourage a greater awareness of the Yew tree's considerable life span.

A few years later, The Foundation's directors, David Bellamy and David Shreeve came up with the idea of taking cuttings from trees estimated as being at least 2000 years old to give to every parish in the country.

In 1997 involving 40 diocesan representatives charged with spreading the word locally to recruit Parish Representatives whose job it would be to gain local support, find a site and organise a ceremony, the 'Yews for the Millennium' campaign began.

In all, 7000 Parish Reps were recruited and three newsletters later a programme of 41 distribution services, involving most of the nation's cathedrals and countless bishops has just been completed.

Before the trees were distributed every parish rep was invited to become a 'parish pump' – an individual who will receive regular information on all things environmental which can be passed onto parish councils, parochial councils, schools and school governors, women's groups etc. The information will involve details of events, award schemes, grants, special occasions, specialist organisations, opportunities for help and details of new and existing environmental schemes for churches and church people.

Hopefully the ancient trees standing almost forgotten in churchyards with all their myths, mystery and magical properties will prove to be the catalysts for positive development and provide an opportunity for the church to become not only environmentally-aware, but environmentally-active. – *David Shreeve*

To become involved, contact 'The Conservation Foundation',
1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR,
Tel: 10171/ 591 3111 Fax: 0171/ 591 3110
Email: conservef@gn.apc.org
Web-site: <http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk>

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RELIGION AND ECOLOGY – REEP'S NEW SERVICE FOR TEACHERS

An innovative – and ecologically friendly – new initiative is REEP's development of a website for RE and the Environment. Due to be launched in the new year as a millennium gift for teachers, this site will focus on school RE at all key stages and provide ways for teachers to build sound environmental education into their RE lessons. All faiths are aware of their inter-connectedness with, and responsibility for, the environment and the multi-faith materials developed on the REEP website will be tailored to syllabus requirements of RE so that they can easily be accessed and incorporated by teachers. These requirements talk about both 'learning about' religion and 'learning from' it; so topics on REEP's site will include details of faith teachings on relevant subjects, examples of spirituality and religious insight related to experience of the environment and general debate such as that on ethical food production. The material will be differentiated to be suitable for different age groups. As well as these resources (one each per half term for secondary and primary schools), the site will provide a link, with descriptors, to all the sites identified as useful to teachers in this context.

This will be regularly updated. One of the great advantages of internet technology is the ease with which improvements can be made – no expensive, wasteful reprints and each user downloading and printing only what is needed.

With the new curriculum subject of Citizenship on the horizon, those concerned with ecology and the welfare of the planet must surely be scenting fresh possibilities. There will be an ongoing debate about the exact relationship between Citizenship and RE, but REEP believes that neither subject can ignore the ages-long wisdom of faith teaching on our environment. It will be aiming to promote – and give examples of – sensitive, stimulating, accessible environmental debate and education in both subjects.

Any suggestions of sites for incorporation on the REEP links page or other ideas related to RE and the environment would be welcome.

Please contact Diana Lazenby on Fax: 0207-373 0947 – Tel: 0207-373 6116 or 0033 231 696827 – email: enquiries@reep.org.

For more about the new website, email: info@reep.org



Tibetan Thangka Tsongkhapa