

# Ecological Aspects of Religion: Christianity and Daoism

Tyler Schuenemann

Faculty Advisor: David Lee Miller, Department of Philosophy

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ethical underpinnings found in Christianity and Daoism which can be applied to an ecological attitude. The purpose of this project is to shed some light on the contributing or undermining relationship that religious beliefs have toward environmental ethics. As shown in the paper, this relationship is diverse, and at times ambiguous due to the diversity of positions taken by these religions towards the environment. One can conclude that within Christianity, there are attitudes of hostility and apathy for the well-being of the environment, as well as a compassionate concern for it. Daoism also contains diverse ways of understanding, and thus relating to the environment. However, these positions predominately advocate a strong sense of respect and intimate connection to the environment—leaving little room for apathy or hostility. Each of these religions contain unique ecological perspectives, however there are overlapping ecological themes between the two religions.

## INTRODUCTION

Although there is not always a consistency between how a person believes they should act, and how they do act, it is clear that one's deeply held beliefs carry great weight when making important ethical decisions. Thus, in regards to environmental ethics, it is important to consider what implications these deeply held beliefs have on one's ecological perspective, and therefore, their ethical stance towards the environment. Lynn White Jr. said it best, "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny. That is, by religion."<sup>1</sup> This paper will explore the main ecological themes which can be found within Christianity and Daoism. These themes are diverse, some of which are unique to a particular religion; others can be found within both traditions.

## CHRISTIANITY

The position that the Christian religion takes towards the environment is not clear. As one often notices when studying the history of a religion, there is a great deal of evolution which occurs in its character—in its beliefs and traditions. Thus in Christianity—and as we shall later see, in Daoism as well—there is not a stance toward the environment taken by the religion which is universally held throughout its diverse denominations and long historical development. It is because of this that when mining Christian thought for its position towards the environment, one only finds an ambiguous potential for a variety of ecological theologies. In the case of Christianity, this veiled position towards the environment could perhaps be due to its primary concentration on the relationship between God and humanity, e.g. creation and redemption, and its secondary concentration on relationships between different people, e.g. ethics.

Prior to the twentieth century when there was a conscious attempt by theologians to explicitly map-out a Christian position toward the environment, attitudes towards nature in Christian thought were usually buried within theological works addressing other issues. In H. Paul Santmire's book, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, he surveys the ecological themes of some of the major thinkers in Christian history—starting with the Church fathers like Irenaeus (130-200 C.E), moving through a collection of important theologians and philosophers like St. Augustine (354-430 C.E.) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1212-1274 C.E.), all the way up to Modern theologians like Karl Barth (1886-1968). In his work, he draws out the ambiguities of the "eco-theological" thought by pointing to three reoccurring metaphors that pervade throughout the Christian tradition—metaphors which contain significant ecological themes.

Two of the metaphors which Santmire notes are both based on the imagery of climbing a mountain. In these metaphors the climber represents the Christian, and the journey up the mountain is the Christian's attempt to achieve their spiritual goal; the difference between the two metaphors lies in what that goal is. Santmire calls the first of

these metaphors “the metaphor of ascent.” This depicts the climber’s goal as transcending, thus leaving behind the world below. The second of these metaphors is “the metaphor of fecundity.” In this case, instead of trying to leave the natural world behind, the climber is traveling up the mountain so that she may gain a new perspective on the earth. Thus, in the metaphor of ascent, the climber is trying to become a “being-beyond-the-earth,” always looking upward, attempting to “...separate oneself from the earth, in order to enter into a totally landless ethereal glory.”<sup>iii</sup> Whereas in the metaphor of fecundity, the climber is a “being-in-the-earth,” often looking back at the world below, so that she may expand her religious consciousness of the world she is embedded in.

The third metaphor Santmire finds in the above mentioned Christian thinkers is the “metaphor of migration to a good land.” This metaphor shows the spiritual journey of the Christian as that of moving into the good land which is to come--the Promised Land. This is well depicted in Deuteronomy 8:8-9: “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks and water, of fountains and springs...a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing...”<sup>iii</sup>

As alluded to above, all three of these theological metaphors contain an ecological attitude buried within. The metaphor of ascent stands out amongst the three as being ecologically negative, meaning it encourages a sense of ambivalence, and at times, hostility towards nature. Thus, this metaphor can be characterized as an anti-cosmic metaphysical dualism, seeing material existence (as opposed to spiritual existence) as unholy; seeing it as separate from God. As a part of the material realm, the environment would then have little-to-no respect in the metaphor of ascent. According to this view, the world we live in could be understood as being created for the sole purpose of being a temporary half-way house for our souls, leaving us in search of a nature-denying salvation. This position would not only permit the exploitation and domination of nature, it can degrade the natural world as a sort of after-birth of the creation of man. Theologians such as Origen, St. Bonaventure, Dante Alighieri, Martin Luther, John Calvin and the Gnostic tendencies of St. Augustine’s early writings reflect this motif, as well as a modern trend in Christianity to see environmental degradation, along with other problems, as trivial because of the impending apocalypse, i.e. the end of the material realm. Although the spiritual motif can be traced to the bible, it is more closely connected to the Neo-Platonist tradition which has influenced Christianity.<sup>iv</sup>

The other two metaphors Santmire identifies, the metaphor of fecundity and the metaphor of migration to the good land, carry ecologically positive attitudes; they affirm the important role that the material world, e.g. the environment, plays in the will of God. These metaphors often inspire a sense of reverence and respect for nature, as well as providing a venue for the development of sense of intrinsic worth in nature. The writings of the Church father Irenaeus contained hints of these metaphors, seeing the physical world as humanity’s home, as good in the eyes of God (hence the Genesis creation story, also I Timothy 4:4-5). The later writings of St. Augustine identify creation as beautiful expressions of the Divine. “Shall I speak of the manifold and various loveliness of sky, and earth, and sea; of the plentiful supply and wonderful qualities of the light; of sun, moon, and stars; of the shade of trees; of the colors and perfume of flowers...? Can we enumerate all these blessings we enjoy?”<sup>v</sup>

St. Francis is probably the most well known figure in Christian history when it comes to religious attitudes towards nature. His religious thought also drew from both of these ecologically positive metaphors. He showed a great reverence and love for the natural world, originating a nature-based mysticism in the Christian tradition; in one case he was even ready to accept some baby robins as fellow friars.<sup>vi</sup>

It should be noted that although the metaphor of fecundity and the metaphor of migration to the good land carry ecologically positive sentiments, there are other ecologically negative tendencies that can and do operate under these metaphors—for example, anthropocentrism and the domination of nature. This occurs because although the motifs affirm the role of nature within the will of God, they allow for an interpretation of that role as being one of subservience to the backbone of God’s creation: humanity.<sup>vii</sup> Thus one could conclude from this attitude, as many often did, that although the environment, along with the rest of the material world, plays a very important role in our journey to salvation, although it is a beautiful gift from God, creation is *still* centered around humanity; we are still allowed to dominate nature for our own benefits. “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth... into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.”<sup>viii</sup>

One last ecological theme in Christianity which played a large role is that of the symbolic character of the material world. This position “[linked] creation with the Creator through symbolism, mixing observation derived from antiquity with Christian interpretation”<sup>ix</sup> When a philosopher asked St. Anthony (350 C.E) why he chose not to have any books in his home, he responded “My book is the nature of created things. In it when I choose I can read the words of God.”<sup>x</sup> This type of learning about God through a study of the universe was a common theme in the early scientific works, e.g. Sir Isaac Newton. This position is ambiguous in its ecological value. It could be positive in the way it may insight a sense of reverence for the natural world (being symbols for the sacred), or it

could unfold negatively by enforcing the separation between the divine and the world—leaving the environment vulnerable to domination and exploitation.

Perhaps it is cliché to point out how influential the break down of the medieval world, and the birth of modernity was to our current historical situation; nonetheless, it is worth mentioning for the purposes of this paper. This is because the source of our recognition and understanding of the environmental crisis<sup>xi</sup> facing the earth has predominantly been the sciences, e.g. ecology— which have emerged out of, and in many ways characterized modernity. Furthermore, the environmental problems themselves seem to be byproducts of the massive industrialization that often characterized the process of modernization.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity's position towards the environment was revolutionized because it became conscious of, and directly addressed, ecological issues. This change is due to the insights of modernity which undeniably showed that humanity is inescapably dependent on, and related, to nature. In particular, studies of ecology, e.g. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, showed that no matter how many theological or philosophical assertions we make about the duality between man and nature, we still cannot avoid the reality that we are destroying what we, *at the very least*, depend on for survival. In this light, Christianity's confrontation with environmental problems is quite familiar to the historian. Whether it was political liberalism, secular philosophy, or any other aspect of modernity--time and time again, Christianity has had to face the variety of challenges this new era has birthed. Thus, in the 1960's, as the environmental movement was emerging, so was a growing pressure for religions such as Christianity to join in by addressing and accommodating to the looming issues of environmental degradation.

The primary response to the environmental crisis made by Christians was a call to develop a sense of spirituality that emphasized the role of the environment. This project of re-thinking Christianity has been dubbed "Ecotheology." Ecotheology started noticeably in North America from the Faith-Man-Nature Group convened by Philip Joranson in 1963 with support from the National Council of Churches.<sup>xii</sup> More influentially, in 1967, the historian Lynn White Jr. published his famous essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,"<sup>xiii</sup> and sparked a deep interest in Ecotheology amongst many intellectual and religious communities. In his article, White argues that Western Christianity has had a drastically negative impact on our attitudes towards creation, i.e. the environment— attitudes which have led to the environmental catastrophes that now confront us. Thus, White not only emphasized the direct connection between religion and ecology,<sup>xiv</sup> but he placed the blame of the environmental crisis square on the shoulders of the Christian world view.

White's controversial article sparked a new interest in understanding the relationship between Christianity and ecology, an interest that would ignite the discipline of Ecotheology. Theologians of this discipline are now in the midst of examining Christian scripture and tradition to find a theology that addresses the ecological concerns of the modern-day. The particular questions which are addressed by these theologians often regard questions of humanity's role in creation, the status of other non-human things in creation, as well as how humans are to be redeemed and whether nonhuman things will be included in redemption.<sup>xv</sup>

It is a common method within Ecotheology to identify an ecologically negative theme within Christian scripture or tradition, eliminate it, and replace it with an ecologically positive one. This is evident in how many Ecotheologians have adamantly challenged the ecologically negative interpretations of the Genesis verses mentioned above, which grant humanity dominion over nature, as well as permission to subdue it. Theologians such as James Barr argue that these particular verses should not be interpreted as endorsing the control and exploitation of nature. Instead, as Ecotheologians like Bernhard Anderson argue, the authority that is given to us is one of the steward—we have an active role in tending for creation.<sup>xvi</sup> This sentiment is echoed by a continuous reinforcement by Ecotheologians that the role of humanity is that of a responsible citizen of the created world--we are to care for creation.

Terence E. Fretheim points out, nature was a very important character in the Old Testament narratives regarding humanity's interaction with God, e.g. God punishing with floods and plagues of locust. Mark Wallace holds that the Holy Spirit continually works to transform and renew all life-forms—nature is a manifestation of God's love.<sup>xvii</sup> McAffe sees God's use of nature as a sort of self identification between him and the natural world; if this is the case then we would suspect a call for respect and reverence of nature if it indeed is a manifestation of God. Similarly, the former Dominican Priest Matthew Fox argues that there is an inherent divinity in creation, which was epitomized when God/Jesus became flesh. However, even if God is not as married to nature as these theologians suggest, his significant use of it certainly shows nature is not an inert object, but an important aspect of the cosmos. Thus, Ecotheologians would emphasize the importance of nature. It is not something with which we can do what we want without regard to its own well being.

The Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes that the earth belongs to God.<sup>xviii</sup> Thus a common sentiment in Ecotheology is to emphasize that humanity is but a guest on God's Earth, and should thus be respectful of it, as well as what dwells within it. In a similar fashion, Francis Schaeffer argues that everything is God's creation, and thus

has intrinsic worth. If this were to be the case, then one would see all of creation as being related in a familial way—all sharing the same divine origin. This kindred relation would suggest a sense of equality between humanity and creation on some basic levels.<sup>xix</sup> The idea of nature having intrinsic worth is crucial to Ecotheology because it counters the ideal that nature is only good insofar as it is useful to humanity—an anthropocentric tendency which Ecotheology is trying to minimize. “In ethical terms, God saw that the world was ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31). In love and freedom he created the world and valued it as good. All the creatures of the world also share in this goodness (I Tim 4:4). This does not mean that the world is ‘good for’ some purpose or simply has utilitarian value to humanity. The world, in its bounty and multiplicity of life, is independently good and ought to be respected as such.”<sup>xx</sup>

This idea of a shared intrinsic relationship that *all* of creation shares, also points to a theme of interrelatedness, a characteristic which permeates all of creation. The Catholic Monk Thomas Berry argues that humanity must recognize the “...creative vision that makes humankind an integral part of a stupendous cosmic emergence.”<sup>xxi</sup> “We need to see ourselves as integral with this emergent process, as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself.”<sup>xxii</sup> These sentiments of seeing humanity deeply embedded in nature are simple, yet undoubtedly crucial developments in Ecotheology due to its agreement with the insights in the science of ecology.

As one can gather from the brief review of Ecotheologies above, Ecotheologians are ultimately convinced that the maxim of caring for the environment is the correct one—for there has been a rapid move to reform their religion in order to justify this maxim. From a historical point of view, this movement appears to be the beginning of another stage in the evolution of Christianity, which has continuously redefined itself in light of external pressures throughout history, e.g. Hellenistic thought, the enlightenment, capitalism, ect.—in this case, the external pressures are those of environmental problems.

When comparing the works of Ecotheologians, there seems to be a varied concern for whether the theologian is simply seeking justification of their preconceived environmental convictions, or if they are drawing on genuine ecologically positive religious themes. From a secular perspective, it seems a bit far fetched that thousands of years ago in the middle-east, there was a religion which conveniently had the same ecological attitudes as a small group of theologians which would spring up thousands of years later, half-way around the world. However, perhaps in the eyes a Christian Ecotheologian, it is the case that through scripture, tradition, and modern insights, God has provided a rich array of ecologically positive themes for us to draw from and live by, so that humanity may play its proper role in God’s plan.

Before moving onto the ecological aspects of Daoism, it should be noted that there may be some significant aspects of Christian scripture which are being ignored by Ecotheologians—aspects which could greatly affect one’s understanding of the texts being mined for ecological themes. The particular aspect I have in mind is a widely held suspicion amongst historians of Ancient Israel that the original Judaic religion—and thus a great deal of the Old Testament scriptures—was polytheistic. As described by Mark S. Smith in his book *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, the Judaic religion probably did not become exclusively monotheistic until somewhere around the seventh century B.C.E.<sup>xxiii</sup> I would contend that if it is indeed the case that the conceptions of divinity amongst the authors of the Old Testament scriptures was a polytheistic one, then this fact *must* be taken into consideration when trying to understand what the scriptures teach. The understanding of who and what plays which role in the universe—the issue which shapes the ecological views—could be drastically altered by the existence of more than one god, especially if these other gods are coupled with attributes of nature, as they often are in polytheistic religions. Of course I cannot conclude that this issue has been completely ignored by Ecotheologians simply because of the limits of my research—I was only able to scratch the surface of the voluminous writings in Ecotheology. However, in all of my research, not once did I run across this issue. If it is the case that polytheism in ancient Israel is universally ignored by Ecotheologians, one is then tempted to speculate that this is due to the undermining implications that the ancient polytheistic roots of the Christian religion has on the religious beliefs held by the Ecotheologians; indeed amongst this group of scholars, a great deal of them indoctrinated into various churches—some are ministers, priests, seminary professors, ect.

In light of this possible bias, one can see that there are certain limits to the current approach to Ecotheology. As self-proclaimed religious reformers, Ecotheologians are calling for change and reform; while at the same time, they maintain a faith to various principles of which their inspiration for reform was originally based on. In the case of Ecotheology, it would seem that these inspirations were convictions of Christian faith paired with recognizing the danger of environmental degradation. I would conclude my discussion of Ecotheology by pointing out that although these inspirations may have sparked the thirst for understanding what the ecological aspects of religion are, they also seem to limit the objectivity of the exploration.

## DAOISM

Unlike Christianity prior to the 1960's, Daoism has often demonstrated in its texts a genuine consciousness regarding the issue of humanity's relationship with the rest of the natural world. Unlike the typical, non-mystical forms of Christianity, Daoism focuses on the religious experience—as opposed to religious belief.<sup>xxiv</sup> Thus it has generally not been Daoism's primary concern to establish doctrines regarding how to act or what to believe. Nevertheless, Daoist texts do directly—through mandates of behavior—and indirectly—often in the ornate manner of laying out metaphysical understandings<sup>xxv</sup>—address the question of how humanity is related to the environment, and how it should treat it.

Primarily, as alluded to above, there is a direct mandate amongst the Daoist scriptures which dictates how one should treat the environment. This mandate is known as *The One Hundred and Eighty Precepts*, which was written some time in the first century of the Common Era—making it one of the earliest conscious efforts of human civilization to protect the environment<sup>xxvi</sup>. This text is a list of rules, some of which call for the respect of all (this especially included the environment). For example, number forty-seven reads “You should not wantonly fell trees;” number fifty-three reads “You should not dry up wet marshes.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Generally speaking, these rules were thought to have been created because the Daoists saw the natural environment as sacred,<sup>xxviii</sup> a tendency based on the metaphysical theories of Daoism, which I will now expand on.

When reviewing scholarship done on Daoism's view towards ecology, it seems that there are essentially two perspectives one can take when trying to understand Daoism's position towards ecology through its metaphysics. For the sake of simplicity, I will label the two perspectives as the “universal perspective” and the “particular perspective.” This distinction in Daoist metaphysics is made for the sake of establishing clear-cut positions towards the environment using the Daoist religion through an analytic method. Thus I will stress that this distinction did not necessarily exist amongst the Daoists religion; it is only for the sake of this paper.

The universal perspective begins from seeing everything, the spiritual and the material, as made up of *Ch'i*. Although this *Ch'i* manifests in three separate forms,<sup>xxix</sup> there is no separation between different modes of existence; in this perspective, there is no dualism between matter and spirit as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Because the spiritual is not restricted to a certain realm, everything contains the spiritual; thus Daoism—like most non-monotheistic traditions—has always seen the environment as holy.<sup>xxx</sup> This perspective entails that all which exists is one continuous whole. The whole, which is the universe, is always in the process of unfolding; there is never a time where things stay the same; the world is like a flowing river; everything is impermanent.

To see all that exists as one continuous whole with *Ch'i* underlying all of it, one is lead to a collection of different ecological themes. The most primary theme of this perspective is the extreme sense in which each thing is interconnected and interdependent with everything else.<sup>xxxi</sup> To the Daoists, the identity of something is dependent on what it relates to. For example<sup>xxxii</sup>, in figure one, although we can clearly tell that there are two circles intermingling, if we were to try and pull them apart, we would destroy their circle shape; this is because the circularity of A is dependent on its relationship to B; they are interdependent. This is opposed to the common Greek view of identity, which views a thing's identity as independently existing, with its relationships existing separate from it (see figure two).



Figure 1.

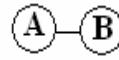


Figure 2.

The view depicted in figure one would entail that humanity has a very intimate relationship with the natural world because humanity's very identity is grounded in its environment. This Daoist sense of interrelatedness is analogous to the identity of the human liver; when viewed separate from its context, separate from its relationship with the rest of the body, one cannot grasp its identity. Only when the liver's relationship to the rest of the body is taken into account is the identity of the liver apparent. This very strong sense of dependence and kinship undoubtedly carries with it a very strong ecologically positive attitude. There is a sense in which it takes the popular maxim “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” to an extreme, for when you are acting on others, e.g. the environment, ultimately you *are* acting on yourself. Although some ecological aspects of Christianity stress a sense of interdependence and interrelatedness between humanity and the environment, they do not go as far as placing the identity of humanity as deeply engrained in nature as Daoism does.

Daoism's deep sense of oneness with nature has brought Daoists scholars to elaborate on an ecological theme they call the “cosmic body.” To borrow an analogy from Alan Watts, this view depicts humanity, not as a quark floating in the river that is the universe, bumping into things as time carries us forward. To the Daoists, we are not this quark, but ripples in the water itself; there is no quark; we are the river and the river is us. To put it more directly, humanity and the rest of the world are one and the same. This does not allow one to think of nature as an

external object, for there is no dichotomy between the external and the internal. Instead, it encourages one to experience nature from within.<sup>xxxiii</sup> “Our action toward the environment is fundamentally to be construed as an action toward the self... the individual’s material being is also a field that must be tended and nurtured from the overarching perspective of its being implicated in this universal ecosystem.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Another ecological theme which can be drawn from the universal perspective is from the Daoists’ goal of transcending the world. For the Daoists, the act of transcending the world, although may seem reminiscent, is quite different from the Christian metaphor of ascent discussed earlier. The Daoist journey towards transcendence is not that of a thing (a human) trying to separate itself from another thing (the world) so that it may leave it behind. This is because to the Daoists, humanity’s identity is part of the world. Thus, the Daoist sense of transcendence is actually the “self-transcendence” of life itself.<sup>xxxv</sup> This is telling in that a common form of transcendence is Daoism is the achievement of immortality. Furthermore, all of the venues for transcendence are to be found within nature, “the only way to get There is from Here...”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Thus, unlike the Christian view of transcendence, the Daoists leave humanity and nature linked, and identify the world, e.g. nature, as the source of transcendence, as opposed to an acosmic God as the source of transcendence.

What was labeled above as the particular perspective is not found within Christianity. This unique outlook is drawn out in the work of Professors Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall<sup>xxxvii</sup>, who explore the way Daoists understood order in the universe. They explain that the Daoists do not see the universe ordered by predestined principles, patterns, or causal laws which dictate behavior. Instead of understanding the world as a whole with governing universal principles, the Daoist sees the world as a spontaneous sum of the particulars which exist within it. These particulars are then understood according to the relationship they have with their context and the harmony they have with their surroundings. Our traditional way of understanding the order of the world may be analogous to a clock, which operates on internal mechanisms which are governed by standard physical/mechanical laws. In contrast, the particular perspective of the Daoist is closely analogous to the “order” found in a stew which emerges (it was not predestined) by the melding of its ingredients together to make up the overall taste of the stew. This order is not a pattern, but a harmony which allows the particular identities of the ingredients to remain identifiable amongst the overall harmony of the stew (the taste).<sup>xxxviii</sup> Thus, instead of having a logical sense of order in the world, the Daoist see an aesthetic order--one which emphasizes the particular thing, event, or experience, and does not trivialize it by seeing it as a mere manifestation of a more primary underlying principle.<sup>xxxix</sup> The ecological implication of this position is that it puts all things on an equal basis. This egalitarian emphasis is present due to the fact that all that exists is a vast number of particulars which hold no precedent over any other. Anthropocentrism is therefore ruled out by not giving humans priority over the rest of the world, as well as by not attempting to organize the world into theoretical principles based on human experience. Another interesting implication of the particular perspective is how it teaches a method in ethics. “We cannot play the theoretician and derive an environmental ethic by appeal to universal principles, but must apply ourselves to the aesthetic task of cultivating an environmental ethos in our own place and time, and recommending this project to others by our participation in their environments.”<sup>xl</sup>

The idea of heaven in Daoism, although distinct from Christianity’s idea of heaven, brings about themes which coincide with Christianity. Similar to the metaphor of migration to a good land, in the Daoist text of the *Taiping jing*, it is taught that if harmony between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity are brought about, the era of Great Peace (*taiping*), i.e. Great Harmony (*taihe*), will arise; this era would entail cosmic harmony and social peace.<sup>xli</sup> In a similarity to Ecotheology’s stewardship ethic, the Daoists are given the duty to care for nature. Some examples of this are maintaining a proper harmony between heaven and earth<sup>xlii</sup>, to give and nourish life,<sup>xliii</sup> to be keepers and custodians of the Ch’i which is life-giving breath,<sup>xliiv</sup> and Ch 7 of the *Zhuangzi* writings teaches that one should maintain conditions that allow all creatures to flourish.<sup>xliiv</sup> In an interesting parallel to the Old Testaments’ depiction of God’s will manifesting in forms of nature as discussed in the Ecotheology section, the *Taiping jing* sees nature as a form of heavenly judgment upon humans;<sup>xlivi</sup> if there is a natural disaster, it is a sign that the heavens look upon humanity poorly.

## CONCLUSION

As shown, Christianity and Daoism each contain multiple perspectives of the environment which lead to different ecological attitudes. These perspectives are usually based on how the religion depicts the nature of the world, i.e. its metaphysics. It is due to this diversity that I would claim that it is unclear whether religion should be seen as a friend or enemy to the environmental movement. Indeed, religion could serve as a meaningful foundation for an ecologically positive perspective, or as an undermining belief which would draw important attention away from the environmental problems facing the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express his appreciation to Dr. Jess Hollenback for his guidance during the research of this project, to Dr. Kenneth Maly, and Dr. Roger T. Ames for their suggestions regarding research material, and to Dr. David Lee Miller and Dr. Mark Chavalas for their input on the final draft of this work.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*. Comp. Louis P. Pojman. (Belmont: Wadsworth Company, 1998), 15.
- <sup>ii</sup> H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 25.
- <sup>iii</sup> Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 23.
- <sup>iv</sup> David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995), 106.
- <sup>v</sup> From Augustine's *City of God*, 22.24. As cited in Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 66.
- <sup>vi</sup> Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 49.
- <sup>vii</sup> This sense of humanity being special in the eyes of God is often drawn from Genesis 1: 26-29, which states that man was created in the image of God.
- <sup>viii</sup> See Genesis 9:1-3. This anthropocentric view of creation being centered around humanity is pervasive throughout many of the Christian figures discussed above, although according to Jeremy Cohen, "interpretations of these passages as containing a license for human beings to develop and exploit nature are quite modern, and certainly no earlier than the eighteenth century." See Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 105.
- <sup>ix</sup> Sorrel, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, 12.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>xi</sup> Some examples of the environmental crisis I am speaking of are the massive air and water pollution, the depletion of the ozone layer, the impending global warming, and the frightening rate of extinction estimated at 10,000 species a year.
- <sup>xii</sup> Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction: Current Thought on Christianity and Ecology," *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), XXXIV.
- <sup>xiii</sup> See White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," 15-20.
- <sup>xiv</sup> This issue, up until White's article, had received very little attention.
- <sup>xv</sup> Gene McAfee, "Ecology and Biblical Studies," *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guild*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 33.
- <sup>xvi</sup> For a critique of the Stewardship ethic, claiming it casts too sharp of a distinction between humanity and nature, thus leading to an ecologically negative hierarchy, see Jung, L. Shannon. "The Recovery of the Land," *Religion and the Life of the Nation: American Recoveries*. University of Illinois Press, 1990. Although Douglas John Hall would argue that the Stewardship ethic does not make humanity superior to other aspects of creation; see Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 171.
- <sup>xvii</sup> See Mark I. Wallace, "The Wounded Spirit as the Basis for Hope in an Age of Radical Ecology," in *Christianity and Ecology* (see note 12), 51-72.
- <sup>xviii</sup> For examples, see Jeremiah 27:5, Psalms 104:1, 50:10-12, and Leviticus 25:23.
- <sup>xix</sup> However, on other levels it is clear that Humanity has a special relationship to God--being created in his image--which the rest of creation does not share.
- <sup>xx</sup> Dobel, Patrick. "The Judeo-Christian Stewardship Attitude to Nature," in *Environmental Ethics* (see note 1), 28.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 173.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Mark S. Smith. *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Jordan Paper, "'Daoism' and 'Deep Ecology': Fantasy and Potentiality," *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape*, ed. N. J. Girardot, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan (Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.
- <sup>xxv</sup> It is important to note that these theories of Daoist "metaphysics" are not doctrines stated by Daoists, rather, they ideas that were commonly accepted in the context of ancient China. As for the metaphysical positions uniquely elaborated on by Daoist texts, these are still not declared doctrines but "generalizations drawn from human

experience in the most basic processes of making a person, making a community, and making a world.” Quote from Roger T. Ames, “Putting the *Te* Back into Taoism,” *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (State University of New York Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>xxvi</sup>Kristofer Schipper, “Daoist Ecology: The Inner Transformation. A Study of the Precepts of the Early Daoist Ecclesia,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 79.

<sup>xxvii</sup>*Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>xxviii</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>xxix</sup>1) great yang (taiyang), the great yin (taiyin), and Central Harmony (zhonghe qi). See Chi-tim Lai, “The Daoist Concept of Central Harmony in the *Scripture of Unconscious Unification*,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 96.

<sup>xxx</sup>Paper, “‘Daoism’ and ‘Deep Ecology’,” 17.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Tu Wei-Ming, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought* (see note 25), 70.

<sup>xxxii</sup>Roger T. Ames, “The Local and the Focal in Realizing a Daoist World,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 269.

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Wei-Ming, “The Continuity of Being,” 77.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>James Miller, Richard G. Wang, and Edward Davis, “Sectional Discussion: What Ecological Themes Are Found in Daoist Texts?” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 151.

<sup>xxxv</sup>*Ibid.*, 152-153.

<sup>xxxvi</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>xxxvii</sup>See Ames, “Putting the *Te* Back into Taoism,” 113-144. and David L. Hall, “From Reference to Deference: Daoism and the Natural World,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 245-264.

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Ames, “Putting the *Te* Back into Taoism,” 118.

<sup>xxxix</sup>For an opposing view of Daoism, see Joanne D. Birdwhistell, “Ecological Questions for Daoist Thought: Contemporary Issues and Ancient Texts,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 23-44. On page 38, Birdwhistell argues that the Daoist world view entails apathy to the particulars of the natural world, for they are “transitory and inconsequential moments in larger processes of constant change (Dao).”

<sup>xl</sup>Ames, “Putting the *Te* Back into Taoism,” 142.

<sup>xli</sup>Zhang Jiyu and Li Yuanguo, “‘Mutual Stealing among the Three Powers’ in the *Scripture of Unconscious Unification*,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 96.

<sup>xlii</sup>This is defined as the allowing of the natural flourishing of the ten thousand things, i.e. all of the particulars in the natural world. See Miller, Wang, and Davis, “Sectional Discussion,” 150.

<sup>xliiii</sup>Chi-tim Lai, “The Daoist Concept of Central Harmony in the *Scripture of Great Peace: Human Responsibility for the Maladies of Nature*,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 103.

<sup>xliiv</sup>Thomas H. Hahn, “An Introductory Study on Daoist Notions of Wilderness,” in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 24), 209.

<sup>xlv</sup>Birdwhistell, “Ecological Questions for Daoist Thought,” 31.

<sup>xlvi</sup>Lai, “The Daoist Concept of Central Harmony in the *Scripture of Great Peace*,” 100.