



A Little Theological Background

MAN AND NATURE



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“Amidst much practical concern and action about the ‘environment’, and much exhortation on behalf of such concern and action, there has been the need for a presentation of the Christian Understanding of the matter.”

Michael Ramsey (1975)

Views of Redemption

- **Western** view – is primarily **Ethical**
humanity apart from the natural world (e.g. Augustine and Anselm)

Christianity (and Salvation) concerned with personal and social existence, with little to say about the destiny of the universe

- **Eastern** view – is also **Physical** or **Natural**
humanity at the heart of the natural world (both Greek and Syrian writing)

Patristic writing sees Salvation more holistically as Personal and Cosmic, Social and Universal



“What is a charitable heart? It is a heart which is burning with charity for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons - for all creatures.

...

This is why such a man never ceases to pray also for the animals, for the enemies of Truth, and for those who do him evil, that they may be preserved and purified. He will pray even for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united with God.”

St Isaac the Syrian (613 – c. 700)

“Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings towards the south?

Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high?

It lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag.

From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away.

Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.”

Job 39:26-30



“Man is not a being isolated from the rest of creation: by his very nature he is bound up with the whole of the universe, and St Paul bears witness that the whole creation awaits the future glory which will be revealed in the sons of God” (Romans 8:18-22) ...

This cosmic awareness has never been absent from Eastern spirituality, and is given expression in theology as well as in liturgical poetry, in iconography and, perhaps above all, in the ascetical writings of masters of the spiritual life of the Eastern Church”

Russian Theologian Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958)

Easter hymns of John of Damascus

The Day of Resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad;
.....
Now let the heavens be joyful,
And earth her song begin,
The round world keep high triumph,
And all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes in gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord hath risen,
Our joy that hath no end.



St Francis of Assisi

*All praise be Yours, my Lord,
through Sister Earth, our mother,
Who feeds us in her sovereignty
and produces Various fruits and
coloured flowers and herbs.*

*All praise be Yours, my Lord,
through those who grant pardon
For love of You;
through those who endure
Sickness and trial.*

From Canticum of the Creatures



Reformation



Luther and Calvin

“Christian theology, however, has always exhibited two attitudes in tension with one another: the freedom of man to use nature on the one hand, and the sacramental character of nature as God’s gift on the other. A divergence between Luther and Calvin illustrates this tension.

Calvin stressed that the creation is not God, and his immediate disciples and successors perhaps exaggerated and oversimplified this into a dichotomy which leaves nature godless, and seems to free man from any inhibitions towards it.

Luther, by contrast, insisted that the creation is God’s creation and is therefore worthy of respect because it is the divine handiwork.”

Man and Nature Report 1974

An Anglican Perspective

“God hath his influence into the very essence of all things, without which influence of Deity supporting them their utter annihilation could not choose but follow. Of him all things have both received their first being and their continuance to be that which they are.

All things are therefore partakers of God, they are his offspring, his influence is in them, and the personal wisdom of God is for that very cause said to excel in nimbleness or agility, to pierce into all intellectual, pure, and subtle spirits, to go through all, and to reach unto every thing which is.”

Richard Hooker (1554 – 1600)



“The Neglect and Recovery of Nature in Twentieth-Century Protestant Thought”

“After the breakdown of the medieval synthesis and the rise of the Protestant religion of grace, the Roman Catholic interpretation of “nature and grace” became increasingly focused on soteriological and anthropological issues ... The Western Church in its main manifestations lost sight of the larger vision of the place of humanity in the cosmos.

“Since the Reformation, theology has generally proceeded by dividing reality into separate components, or loci, which it then interprets ... Traditional dualities include: God vs. World, Divine vs. Human, Mind vs. Body, Nature vs. Grace, Natural vs. Supernatural, Transcendence vs. Immanence, Nature vs. History, Nature vs. Culture.”

Harold Oliver (1992)