"O Lord, our Lord, 
how majestic is thy name in all the earth. 
When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, ... 
the moon and the stars which thou hast established; 
what is man that thou art mindful of him, 
and the son of man that thou hast care for him? 
Yet, thou hast made him little less than God. . . . 
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands. . . ."
(Psalm 8)

There can be no doubt that the Judaeo-Christian view of nature is beautifully captured in this Old Testament poetic prayer, which echoes faithfully the message of Genesis 1-2. And I would have fulfilled my main task here if I succeeded in clearly bringing out the different elements at work in this psalm. However, even then three important problems would remain unanswered:

1. Whether Christianity has been faithful in its history to this basic view of nature or substantially deviated from it under extraneous influences.

2. Whether this view has enabled the Christian community to have a sound relationship to its natural environment, a wise praxis vis-a-vis nature.

3. Whether, also in the future, this view of nature can constitute a sufficient guide for a sound praxis toward the natural environment.
I. The Problem

But before exploring the topic assigned to me—"the question how Christianity is related theologically to nature"—I would like to make clear for myself what exactly the problem is in relationship to which the Christian position must be seen and judged.

In his letter of invitation, Professor Lee has signaled the problem to be treated in this symposium of "Man and His Natural Environment" in the following words: "The biosphere of our planet is being polluted at an ever increasing pace by industrialization. This betrays a wrong view of and attitude (praxis) toward nature: seeing and treating nature merely as object of exploitation for the fulfilment of human desires."

I admire Prof. Lee's terse formulation of the problem, and would therefore like to start my reflections from there. The first thing that strikes me then is how extremely difficult it is to verbalize our problem, especially in relation with religious traditions, without smuggling in prejudicial elements by the words we choose.

/a The object of our concern. In the above formulation we find already four different terms to name the object of our concern:

1. "Man's Natural Environment." This term puts man squarely in the middle and sees it as his problem. It also denotes, in a sense — in contradistinction with "cultural environment" — that this environment may not be reducible to man but, on the contrary, "pre-date" and "carry" him.

2. "The Biosphere." This is a term culled from the natural sciences, without any history in the religious traditions. However, it puts the stress on life, a central idea in many religions, and appears to see man as one species of living beings among many others.

3. "The Earth." This word has, of course, played a big role in religion, especially in primitive religion with its idea of the mother-earth or earth-woman. It often appeared as one pole of the duality: heaven (sky) and earth, with man living in the space opened up between the two and participating in both. Old Chinese thinking is said to be based on the representation of three fundamental forces: Heaven, earth, and man; and the Bible says, for instance, "The heavens belong to Yahweh, but the earth He has given to the sons of Adam." (Ps. 115, 16) The Japanese then like to say that the East, as originally an agricultural society, honors the gods of the earth, while the Semitic religions, born among the nomads of the desert, worship the gods of the sky.

4. "Nature." This might be the most ideology-laden term of all. In science it appears as a totally objective system of laws, free of all gods and indifferent to the human. In various world views and religions, on the other hand, it denotes "the divine realm, the ultimate space which embraces gods and men." We find this in the Greek Stoic, but also in Lao-tse and Chuang-tse nature appears as the ultimate order and ideal to which man must only conform, with exclusion of all human arbitrary activity. "Nature" thus comes to mean also: spontaneous, free from human calculation, even in the doctrine of salvation of Japan's Jodo Shinshu school.

Besides these four, one more term, at least, should be mentioned: the world (or "the natural world"). In religion, it usually appears in the polarity: God-world, the mundane (samsara) and the supra-mundane (nirvana, the spiritual realm). One then speaks of world-affirmation and world-negation, and can distinguish religions according to the greater or lesser degree of involvement of God in the world, or, again speak of
cosmic religion (where the world is intimately involved in the process of salvation) and subjective religion (a question only of God and me). On the other hand, however, the world appears, in primitive religion but also in Greek thinking, as the superior side, this time, of another polarity: world (kosmos) over against primitive chaos. It then designates the order which makes human life possible.

b/ The human praxis. When then the relationship of the human to this reality comes into question, we speak of a “wrong attitude or praxis” toward nature. When we say “wrong,” however, the question immediately becomes: wrong, how and why? Whom or what do we wrong? And a further question: What could be the right word to designate that “wrong praxis”?

We may first think of “wrong use” or “abuse.” Some may find this to be already a pleonasm, contending that use of nature is wrong in itself, since thereby we reduce nature to a mere object, a “thing,” a means to an end. (A bit like Kant objects to treating one’s neighbor as a means, or a devout monotheist rejects all praxis wherein God is considered as a machina to further our own ends), and it is true enough that the most fitting direct object of the verb “using” is a “thing.” But if we admit the possibility of a right use of nature (which we implicitly do by speaking of a wrong use), what is it then that makes a particular use wrong? Our use of a thing is called wrong when it goes against the structure or inner working of the thing, with the result that it soon loses its “use” or proper utility, as when we would hammer a nail into a wall by means of a radio set.

We sometimes speak of “irresponsible use,” for example of money. But the question then becomes: irresponsible to whom or what? In the case of money, clearly a thing of human convenience only, the responsibility cannot be towards the thing used itself, but only towards humans, the user himself, his family, his community. When, however, we speak of somebody using his body irresponsibly, a new element seems to enter the picture, since we feel somehow that the body has a kind of existence of its own, rights of its own — could we say a certain subjectivity? And would nature be in the same category, as the extension, as it were, of the human body?

The word “exploitation,” also used by Professor Lee, appears to be free of value judgment when used in connection with things, as in “exploitation of a copper mine,” but takes on a pejorative meaning the moment it is used with regard to human subjects. It thus seems to straddle an important divide. It means in any case: to use something for the satisfaction of human needs and desires, and this becomes bad when it is done with disregard of the object’s dignity, rights, feelings. Then it comes very near in meaning to “rape.” As a matter of fact, the expression “rape of nature” is sometimes used in connection with our problem, and may be useful on account of its emotional appeal. However, since this use is clearly a derived and metaphorical one, it may be better to stick to the term “exploitation” for purposes of philosophico-theological analysis. Our question could then become: Which presuppositions do we adopt when we want to give the word “exploitation of nature” a pejorative meaning?

But we have to consider at least one more term. A wrong attitude to nature is sometimes described as “loss of harmony with nature.” The view of a harmonia praestabilita of man and nature, underlying this expression, has certainly been widely held in world views, in the West as in the East, and takes form, for example, in the macrocosmos-microcosmos conception. The particular slant of this expression — in contradistinction with the term “use” which from the beginning posits the human as the
central subject — is then that nature and the human appear here as (equal) partners, or even that man is seen as subordinate to nature, as a part to the whole.

This short and far from exhaustive excursion into the woods of terminology may have told us something already not only about the trickiness of the words we use, but also about the multi-faceted character of our problem.

Let us now approach our problem more directly from die Sache selbst. The first things to consider then might be that we are dealing with an eminently practical problem: a danger, a threat; a universal and radical threat to the survival of all humanity and even to the biosphere of our planet. A danger which must therefore be actively averted by all possible means and at all costs. The causes of this threat must obviously be done away with, and therefore first be identified.

How then does religion enter the picture? Before a threat of such magnitude, it seems self-evident that all possible human resources, and therefore also religion, must be mobilized. But how can the role of religion in this concerted battle be circumscribed? On this point, Professor Lee gives us a further indication by pointing out as the fundamental cause of our predicament: a wrong view of nature, of the relationship of the human to his natural environment. Religion then naturally comes into the picture since, just like philosophy, it contains and propagates a certain view of the whole of reality and therefore also, be it only implicitly, of nature. The appeal to all religions to examine anew their view of nature, to take responsibility for it and, possibly, to revise it, then sounds reasonable enough. Still, a few questions must be raised, especially with regard to the efficacy of this measure.

1. Do we not presuppose here a rather one-sided causative influence of our ideas (our mind) on our praxis of nature, and thus on nature itself? And do we not vitiate thereby from the start our idea of the right relationship between the two? Are not the diverging ideas of different cultures, in turn greatly influenced by their praxis, which is co-determined by the face nature itself shows in their respective regions: landscape, climate, vegetation . . . ?

2. In how far, or under which circumstances, is the prevalent world view of a developed society determined by religion? Granted that the influence of religion on this point, during most of human history, has been great, were there not also other, not strictly religious, ideas at work in these after all specialized cultures? Ideas which may have been quite different from the (original) religious ones, but which the religion may have learnt in time to accommodate within its own world view?

3. This brings us to the question which the Canadian philosopher of religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, has been belaboring in several of his books, and which is certainly relevant when we ask for the view of nature of various religious traditions. Smith's question is, as you know: Do we not essentially misrepresent reality when we speak of different religions as if they were monolithic and unchanging blocs? Are not all religious views balancing acts of many, and sometimes contradictory, elements, the constellation of which changes with place and time?

In my second and third questions I am thinking, first of all, of what is often sweepingly called “the domineering attitude to nature of the Christian West,” over against the stance of reverent accommodation of the East. When I hear this, I am immediately reminded, for instance, of the deep change in the Western view of nature wrought during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I would, however, prefer to illustrate my point with the example of Buddhism, of which every Japanese will tell you that harmony with nature is
one of its essential points. An objective reader of the oldest texts preserved must agree, I believe, with Heinrich Dumoulin, where he writes: "In his doctrinal talks, the Buddha preached an existential path of salvation without any cosmic aspect." Dumoulin then immediately adds, however: "But, on the other hand, the cosmic connection appears already in the earliest transmitted schemes of meditation." This cosmic ingredient then appears to grow stronger and stronger—under the influence of various factors, religious and profane, and maybe particularly of the cosmic sense of Taoism—till it leads to the Hua-yen idea of "the cosmic all-one of reality in the Buddha."

4. A fourth and last question which I would like to introduce here brings us back to the fact that the problem under discussion is, after all, not a point of theoretical doctrine—such as, for example, whether ultimate reality is a personal God or impersonal emptiness—but a practical one. This would mean, first of all, that theoretical considerations, no matter how beautiful and maybe ultimately true in themselves, are of little use if they cannot be concretized and applied in everyday praxis. To speak to the point, it would not help anybody if all religions started advocating living in harmony with nature without interfering with it. Indeed this sounds better than techno-scientific manipulation of nature, but can never become a substitute for it, nor as such lead to practical guidelines. Man is *homo faber* "by nature:" Since he is the only species in nature not immediately adapted to his environment by his body, it is a biological necessity for man to transform his environment by the use of tools. The mere principle of non-interference, then, would only lead to the same extinction of humanity now feared from its opposite, over-interference, only in a much shorter span of time.

This may be the moment to remember that our preoccupation with the pollution of the environment—no matter how justified—is shared only by peoples become affluent as a result of industrialization. Dom Helder Camara must have said once: "We of the developing countries are ready to join in the battle against pollution, but we want pollution—i.e., industrialization—to happen first." We might also recall that, in history, the ideal of non-interference with nature could only be entertained by people who, as masters, could leave the necessary interference with nature to their slaves, or the unavoidable killing of animals to a class of outcasts.

What I want to say here is that, since it is a practical question, we need a more nuanced view of nature and man, one that permits us to make distinctions and build on it a practicable environmental ethics. Or, as somebody has put it rather graphically, we are not served by a romanticism which "has difficulty distinguishing the eradication of the polio or smallpox virus from the extinction of the Bengal tiger, for example." In the line, then, of an efficient action to save humankind and its natural environment, religions may be called upon to provide a sound view of nature whereon a practicable environmental ethics can be built. This may be the most valuable service they can render humankind in its hour of need. But a question remains: Does the responsibility of the religions stop there? I would not think so. Philosophy may feel entitled to limit its responsibility to the realm of ideas (although Marx negates even this), and be satisfied with a change of ideas worked in the minds of individuals, but can religion? Does not religion's lofty ideal of presence in the world to save it (be it as followers of the God-become-man or as Bodhisattvas) compel religious communities to effective historical action, on the basis of a renewed theology of nature?

As a final reflection on the problem we are faced with and the possibility of religious traditions to contribute to its
solution, it may be good for us to be fully aware that our present problem is a new one: that nature reveals itself today from an angle remarkably different from those it revealed itself from to our ancestors. The American philosopher, Thomas Berry, puts it this way: "This is what makes our problems definitively different from those of any other generation of whatever ethnic, cultural, political or religious tradition or of any other historical period. For the first time we are determining the destinies of the earth in a comprehensive and irreversible manner."5

It cannot therefore be expected that any philosophical or religious tradition would contain a ready-made answer to this problem it was never before confronted with. This certainly is the case with Christianity, as the Catholic theologian, Romano Guardini, clearly recognized already some thirty years ago. He said then in his lectures: "The global historical situation, the stage which the power of man and its destructive possi-

II. Elements of the basic Christian View of the Natural Environment

a/ What is said about it. It may be good to begin this summary of the Christian ideas on nature and natural world with a recall of what is commonly said about them today.

In Japan Christianity is rather generally considered to be a religion which puts man apart from nature and in a position of domineering and nearly inimical superiority to nature; and I get the impression that this idea is widely shared by most of the Buddhist world, and maybe by "the East" in general. But also in the West, from the moment people awakened to the fact of the dangerously growing problem of the pollution of the earth, it seems to have become common sense to blame Christianity for it. (However, in the West Christianity has become used to being made the scape goat for everything that goes wrong under the sun.) It is then said, for example, that "Christianity bears an immense burden of guilt for the present ecological crisis."7

Not a few Christian theologians tend to agree, at least in part, with that verdict; and the same Romano Guardini may again have been one of the first to acknowledge the Christian guilt. "We have been speaking of an 'omission' by Christians in their care for the world, but that term is not strong enough. We must come to see that it is a question of real guilt."8 Still, most of these theologians would consider that this historical guilt is not due to any shortcoming in basic Christian doctrine, but to a one-sided stress on some particular points of the doctrine with negligence of the balancing ones, and to the adoption of extraneous elements, especially since the
late Middle Ages and the spreading of
the Protestant ethos. But there are some
theologians who go a step further and
speak of an essential weakness or one­
sidedness of Christianity on this point.
Langdon Gilkey, for example, in a paper
on the Japanese philosopher Nishitani
Keiji writes: "If one sets forth an honest
explication of the Christian world view
in our own day, one must admit not
only the tendency towards world domi­
nation that Nishitani noted but also the
seeming inability within classical Chris­
tian terms to provide an adequate
account of nature. On this score, Chris­
tianity needs tutelage, and tutelage from
traditions that seem able more creatively
to deal with nature, for example, from
Buddhism, from Confucianism, and (sur­
prisingly) from Shinto."9 In compara­
tive studies it is then often added that
Buddhism suffers from a corresponding
weakness, in not being able to provide
an adequate account of history and to
build a social ethic.

As to the present situation, many
would agree that Christianity did not
fully come to grips yet with an already
much older but intimately connected
problem, that of nature as it appears
in science; or, as Nishitani would put it,
did not succeed in reconciling the dead
mechanical nature of science with the
living teleological world of traditional
Christianity. I shall call again on Guar­
dini to synthesize the problem for us:
"A view of the world, wherein the real
scientific realizations, the authentic con­
tents of revelation, and the impulses to
a stewarding of the world such as history
now presents it as our task, would have
found a credible unity, did not emerge
clearly yet."10

When asked what my own view on all
this is, I would summarize my position —
which is at work, of course, in the fol­
lowing presentation of the Christian
doctrine — provisionally as follows.
1. The original and basic Christian
view of the world or nature is extraor­
dinarily rich and well-balanced; and for
all those who made it their own in its
entirety it has been conducive to a sound
attitude toward nature. As such, it has
also greatly contributed to the birth of
science and technology.

2. It is, however, true that in several
periods of the Christian history, one­
sided and unbalanced interpretations to
the detriment of nature have been very
influential, either by an excessive world­
negation or a loss of interest in nature.

3. Finally, it may also be true that,
in the present ecological crisis, the tradi­
tional Christian view by itself, even when
restored to its original balance, is not
sufficient any longer as a guide for the
necessary praxis towards nature. Any­
way, I look expectantly for tutelage
from other religious traditions... and
from nature itself.

b/ The Judaeo-Christian view of nature.
When we now finally come to the factual
presentation of the Christian view of
man's natural environment, you will
soon be aware that my text is, for the
greater part, nothing but an analysis of
the different elements Christian consci­
ousness has found in the creation story
as appearing at the very beginning of
the Old Testament, chapters 1 and 2
of Genesis.

Scholars in comparative religion are
inclined to call this creation story the
Judaeo-Christian "myth of origin," and
indeed, when it comes to a view of the
world, Christianity, although usually
characterized as "historical religion,"
seems to have this point in common
with the so-called primitive or tribal
religions, and to be markedly different
from that other historical religion, Bud­
dhism, in this regard. This remark may
not be totally irrelevant, if one considers
that some people nowadays urge a return
to the more reverend attitude of these
animistic religions towards nature. For
them nature was indeed sacred as the
dwelling place of gods and souls. But,
of course, the Judaeo-Christian "myth
of origin" cannot simply be subsumed
under that category. For that it has
too many distinguishing traits. To indicate right away a very important and salient one: the biblical creation story, although very cosmic indeed, figures in the Bible as the outcome and foundation of an extremely realistic conception of salvation by God. If God is able really to save his people, body and soul, He must be the Lord not only of all peoples but even of all the earth.

1. *The quality of being of the natural world.* The creation doctrine has rendered this world, its materiality included, densely real, unescapably serious, and fundamentally good for Christian consciousness.

*Real.* This means that views of the world as not really real but fundamentally illusion, the product of our deluded mind or karma, like the chimaera produced by a magician (cf. the Indian Maya conception, for example), could never take roots in Christian soil. The German Catholic thinker, Josef Pieper has argued convincingly that the density of reality represented by the concept of *esse* (being) in Western philosophy derives from the idea of creation. And history shows how Christianity, although strongly influenced by Neo-Platonic ideas, never accepted Plato's idea of this world being only secondarily real and reducible to ideas. The idea of creation implies that the world is not reducible to anything else, not even to God, since God himself once and for all posited it "outside of himself" as a partner. This induces Guardini to write: "We have the duty to hold finite being into esteem... The Christian should not 'merely' stick to God."\(^\text{11}\)

*Serious.* Through the doctrine of creation, the world appears thus as an ineluctable "given" (in the sense both of a "gift" and of an independent reality). The world with its natural order and its upheavals, together with all the historical events happening to man in that setting, affect man not only on the supposedly superficial level of daily life but equally on the final level of salvation. It is in that setting and in these events that God is at work and must be encountered. In line with Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 25-37) and his sermon on the last judgment (Mt 25, 31-46), it can be said that for the Christian there is no reality more real than the momentary suffering in body and soul of the neighbor. In that sense, Christianity can be rightly described as a rather "materialistic" religion.

*Fundamentally good.* On the level of the doctrine of salvation, with its stress on human sin and the temptations to sin coming from the sensual world, Christianity may sound rather pessimistic and world-negating. This, however, is counter-balanced, on the underlying level of creation, by the idea of the fundamental goodness of the world, human nature included, as creatures of God's hand. Mainline Christianity never forgot that Genesis repeats, after every act of creation of one aspect of the world: "and God saw that it was good." This forbids the true Christian to be a full-fledged prophet of doom, no matter how terrible a mess we humans are making of this world. As one Catholic author, half facetiously, says: "If the world is God's by origin, and under his ultimate sovereignty, He has the self-imposed obligation of making some kind of success of it."\(^\text{12}\)

2. *God beyond nature.* The creation story has, however, also other implications. It also teaches that the God, who created this world "out of nothing" in supreme freedom, transcends this world; in other words, that the final locus of sacredness lies not in the world itself but beyond it. This can also be expressed by saying that this world is not "nature" (self-born; carrying its own origin and value within itself) but a "work" of God's hand. This idea certainly has meant a strong "disenchantment of nature" (*Entzauberung der Natur*, Max Weber): an expulsion from nature of the animistic supernatural presences and...
their whimsical ways; and has functioned as one of the conditions of possibility for the birth of the natural sciences.

This, however, does not mean that the human attitudes which science has actually fostered can be put down as Christian. The difference can maybe best be indicated by a word of Lévi-Strauss: "Thanks to scientific knowledge we have come to 'reducing' the objects to a considerable degree... while for the primitive there always subsists an 'excess of object'." From there we could say that by the creation idea the density of the object is not per se reduced or diminished. Also for the Christian there is an "excess of object:" things of nature are never only "things." They are sacred as the works of God or, as the old tradition has it, they contain a "trace" (vestigium) of their maker. And nature as a whole is seen as a sign, a revelation of God (the unwritten Bible), and some natural phenomena are singled out as special symbols of the divine and taken up into the liturgy.

The basis of Christian life is, after all, the experience of all things, the own existence included, as "given:" received at each moment from God's hand. Still, we could say that we have here the first juncture of "seam" in the Christian edifice that is vulnerable to accretion or malpractice. The temptation has been there, indeed, of thinking that one could exalt God by depreciating his creatures. And it is true, I believe, that Christianity has rather generally succumbed to a somewhat milder form of this same aberration: "Most Christian teaching goes too quickly from the merely physical order of things to the divine presence in things. While this is important, it is also important that we develop a sense of the reality and nobility of the natural world in itself."14

3. Man's place in nature. Next we come to the question of how Christianity sees man's place in this world created by God. The first thing to be remarked here is that the Bible story presents man-in-the-world or man-together-with-nature. The first title of man in Christianity, the fundamental attribute that marks his place in the totality of things, is not, as some may think, "sinner" (or bonpu) but "creature," a title he has in common with all of nature and which is comparable to the Buddhist title for man, shujō, "sentient being" 留生. Hereby man is marked as a finite being, totally dependent for its existence on God, exactly like all other creatures, spiritual or material, living or inanimate.

This explains how in medieval scholastics cosmology, the hierarchical structure of the world, is more basic than anthropology. To illustrate this, I want to quote a text by St. Thomas wherein that togetherness and mutual complementarity of all things (man and nature) is expressed: "Because the divine goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, God produced many and diverse creatures, so that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness most perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature (be it angel or man)."15 We are very far, here, from Descartes' disembodied and world-less "cogito ergo sum." This feeling of fellowship with all creatures is, of course, most vividly expressed in the well-known canticle of St. Francis of Assisi: "... Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us..."

Still, it is clear enough that the Bible views nature, not in a scientifically objective way but from the outset, in a religious perspective, as the natural environment or Lebenswelt (life space) of the subject of religion, man. It presents the world "such as man encounters it, such as man sees it and makes it to his milieu; or, the other way around,
the world insofar as it is ordered by the Creator toward man, as its center of meaning. Man is of nature, a part of the world, but a very special, central part: the crown of creation whereby all creation is brought back to God.

For a short clarification of this Christian view of man's relationship to nature, two texts of Genesis can serve as our guides. The first: "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, ... and over all the earth.'" (Gen 1:26) The much objected-to word, "dominion," is right here. Since it is clear enough how this word can be abused, and why it is objected to, I can limit myself here to a short defense of it in this context. First, a simple question: Can you imagine any form of human existence and culture, which would not be built on some kind of dominion over the natural environment? If not, the problem left is only the quality of that dominion. And in the whole of the Bible man's dominion is qualified, most emphatically, as dominion under God, as God's servant, and in the service of the whole creation. Man's lordship is clearly a stewardship with accountability to the real Lord of the world, God; and a stewardship in function of the whole of God's creation. This is indicated, for example, in our second Genesis text: "... there was no man yet to till the earth... - then the Lord God formed man of dust from the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..." (Gen 2,5-7). In other words, man's cultivation of the earth (culture) is willed by God from the beginning for the perfection of his creation. Man is created in such a way that he can fulfill that mission. One aspect of that "perfection of nature" is its direction as a totality towards God through man, God's image. Already in some of the Wisdom texts and psalms of the Old Testament, but clearer still in Christian speculation and liturgy, there is a strong consciousness of this role of man: Man has received consciousness, reason, and language in order to be the consciousness and tongue of all the earth, to praise God in the name of all creation. The backbone of the monastic life in Christianity, the "Holy Office" many times a day, rests on this idea. "Let heaven and earth praise Him, the sea and everything that moves therein..." (Ps 69, 34).

To summarize, I dare say that, in the Christian picture, the claim that man's use of and dominion over nature must be a responsible one is crystal clear. But, again, we may find that this view of man's relationship to the world, in its complexity, contains the seeds of possible distortion. The problem lies in the juncture: Man is taken from the earth and thus part of nature, but he is also god-like, containing God's breath, linked to God in an especially direct way. If now we call these two aspects with the Greek names: body and soul, matter and spirit, the coast is clear for a tie-up with the Greek dichotomous view of man or a weltfremd spiritualism. It cannot be denied that something of this is present as a strong temptation in the whole of Christian history, beginning with Origen and passing through the extremely influential St. Augustine's "God and the soul; the rest does not matter." Those are distortions of the whole biblical view, but it is true that, even in the balanced picture, "The essence of man is not so much to fit into and be a tiny reflection of the whole order of the world as to be a person in the face of God."17

4. Nature in further Christian doctrine. We now leave the doctrine of creation to have a (very) short look at how world and nature fare in the further chapters of the Christian doctrine. We then first come to the doctrine of "original sin" (depicted, again in a mythical way, in the next chapter (3) of Genesis). Through this sin, humanity puts itself in a wrong relationship ("non serviam") to God, but the Bible describes the
effects of sin essentially as a vitiation of man’s relationship to nature (including his own “human nature”). Rather than revealing God to him, nature now becomes source of suffering and tends to draw man away from God, to lure him into sin. When this vitiation is seen as radical, i.e. as a total corruption (as it sometimes is, especially in Protestantism), God cannot be found in nature any longer, and man is encouraged to shun the world, to find God only in himself or in the Bible. Fortunately, the Catholic tradition has always believed in an only partial corruption by sin: Man’s eye and mind are clouded by his sinfulness, so that it has become difficult for him to see and use the world in the right perspective and to recognize God in nature.

Throughout, the following is clear, however: While the drama of sin and redemption focuses on man, nature is involved together with man, for both are inseparably conjoined. “For all creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... because creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.” (Rom 8, 19; 21) Then there will be “A new heaven and a new earth.” (Apoc 21, 1) Although this will ultimately be a gratuitous gift from God, creator and redeemer, an important aspect of the Christian life as redeemed by God is to work towards the realization of this “new earth.” It is an important part of Christian consciousness that man has the task and the mandate, as God’s collaborator, to work for “a better world.” But it is true that, too often, this world is seen only as a “human world.”

It is significant, in this perspective, that the figure of the savior, Jesus Christ, is soon endowed, in the Christian tradition, with the central cosmic role. Already in St. John’s gospel he is the logos, the principle of creation, and the early Church Fathers will further elaborate this theme, till finally a Teilhard de Chardin comes along to pervade the whole picture of the world’s evolution, as painted by modern science, with the idea of Christ, the Omega, the final unifying point of the whole evolution.

As to Christ’s teaching, as found in the gospels, the cosmic dimension is certainly not conspicuous, but it cannot be denied that, in all his words and deeds, Jesus shows an extraordinary “nearness to the earth” or “fellowship with nature.”

It is probably the case that, in order to avoid the dreaded catastrophes to nature and humankind, we would not need grand new theories about nature—if only we could recapture somehow that “nearness to the earth.” This, however, has become very difficult for us, for, as Lévi-Strauss says, “Modern man has practically no direct contact anymore with the concrete universe... for nearly always nature comes to him stamped already with his human seal.”

Notes

1 Langdon Gilkey, “Keiji Nishitani’s Religion and Nothingness” (unpublished paper), p. 27.
2 Teilhard de Chardin may have been the first to draw the term into a religious context.
3 Heinrich Dumoulin, Oestliche Meditation und Christliche Mystik, Freiburg/Munchen: Verlag Karl Alber, 1966, pp. 139, 154, and passim.
7 Quoted in Thomas Berry, o.c., p. 415.
8 Romano Guardini, o.c., p. 492. "Until now the Christian ethos has recognized positive and negative tasks in the world, but it has never realized, at least not clearly enough, that the world as such has been entrusted to its care." (p. 494)
9 Langdon Gilkey, o.c., pp. 25-26.
10 Romano Guardini, o.c., p. 489.
11 Romano Guardini, ibid., p. 514.
14 Thomas Berry, o.c., p. 416.
15 S. Th., Ia qu. 47 a. 1 (the words within brackets are mine, for stress).
16 Romano Guardini, o.c., p. 93.
18 Lévi-Strauss, as quoted by J.-D. Robert, o.c., p. 819.