

# The Role of Christianity in Ecological Awakening: Foundations for Christians' Sustainable Behavior Toward Nature

## Rola chrześcijaństwa w przebudzeniu ekologicznym: podstawy zrównoważonego zachowania chrześcijan wobec przyrody

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### Abstract

The ecological crisis is a major challenge facing humanity. For centuries, our conviction that nature's strength is insurmountable hindered the development of the idea that human actions may pose a threat to nature. As a result of the industrial revolution, people experienced the effects of the environmental crisis on a global scale. This has led to an increased sense of awareness that the Earth is fragile, vulnerable, and defenseless in the face of the actions of man who uses the advances of science and technology against nature. Moreover, the aftermath of environmental devastation may prove irreversible, threatening the survival of human beings or even life itself on our planet. Thus, raising environmental awareness has become a crucial element in overcoming the ecological crisis. Only people who are aware of existing threats and the consequences of their actions can abandon egoistic, destructive attitudes toward nature and build sustainable attitudes toward the natural environment. Many studies highlight the awakening of environmental consciousness. Various publications, expert reports, international organizations' initiatives, and the actions of politicians are among the crucial factors that can act as a catalyst for stirring this consciousness. Yet the role of religion in triggering and deepening environmental awareness is rarely discussed. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to show the contribution of religion in this regard, with a particular focus on the role of Christianity. Christianity's contribution has been confirmed by official statements from Christian leaders on ecological issues as well as publications from the beginning of the 20th century that addressed the ecological crisis from the Christian perspective. The author hopes that further studies will show the contribution of other religions thereby complementing our knowledge on the role religion plays in overcoming the environmental crisis.

**Key words:** ecological awakening, environmental awareness, environmental consciousness, religion and ecology, Christianity and ecology, sustainable behaviors

### Streszczenie

Kryzys ekologiczny to poważne wyzwanie, przed którym stanęła ludzkość. Przez stulecia nasze przekonanie, że natura jest nie do pokonania, utrudniało rozwój idei, że działania człowieka mogą stanowić zagrożenie dla przyrody. W wyniku rewolucji przemysłowej ludzie doświadczyli skutków kryzysu ekologicznego na skalę globalną. Doprowadziło to do wzrostu świadomości, że Ziemia jest krucha, podatna na zranienie i bezbronna wobec działań człowieka, który wykorzystuje postęp nauki i technologii przeciwko przyrodzie. Co więcej, skutki dewastacji środowiska mogą okazać się nieodwracalne, zagrażając przetrwaniu ludzi, a nawet samemu życiu na naszej planecie. Tak więc podnoszenie świadomości ekologicznej stało się kluczowym elementem przezwyciężenia kryzysu ekologicznego. Tylko ludzie, którzy są świadomi istniejących zagrożeń i konsekwencji swoich działań, mogą porzucić egoistyczne, destrukcyjne postawy wobec natury i budować zrównoważone postawy wobec środowiska naturalnego. Wiele badań podkreśla przebudzenie świadomości ekologicznej. Różne publikacje, raporty ekspertów, inicjatywy organizacji międzynarodowych i działania polityków należą do kluczowych czynników, które stanowią katalizator pobudzający tę świadomość. Jednak rola religii w wyzwalaniu i pogłębianiu świadomości ekologicznej

jest rzadko przedstawiana. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zatem pokazanie wkładu religii w tym zakresie, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli chrześcijaństwa. Wkład chrześcijaństwa został potwierdzony przez oficjalne oświadczenia przywódców chrześcijańskich na temat kwestii ekologicznych, a także publikacje z początku XX wieku, które poruszały kwestię kryzysu ekologicznego z chrześcijańskiej perspektywy. Autor ma nadzieję, że dalsze badania pokażą wkład innych religii, uzupełniając w ten sposób naszą wiedzę na temat roli religii w przezwyciężaniu kryzysu ekologicznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przebudzenie ekologiczne, świadomość ekologiczna, religia i ekologia, chrześcijaństwo i ekologia, zrównoważone postawy

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## Introduction

A key element of ecological awakening was breaking away from the consciousness that was characteristic of humanity since its beginnings. Above all, this refers to the belief that our planet is indestructible, its resources are inexhaustible, and that we pose no threat to it (McKibben 1989, 3-5; Łepko 2006). This stance, however, was justified only until modern times for it was then that the so-called program of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was implemented. Its basic tenet was man's mastery over nature through knowledge (Bacon, 1955, book 1, III; Łepko, 1995). As a result of the intense development of specialized sciences, a scientific-technological revolution took place that was followed by the industrial revolution. Thanks to scientific discoveries and technical innovations, we have gained tools that have made us capable of defending ourselves from nature and exploiting its resources on an unprecedented scale. What is more, we have even become capable of threatening and even defeating it. Consequently, it was in the 20th century that people realized the Earth's fragility, the limitations of its resources, the scale of its devastation, and the power of technology. Becoming aware of these processes is referred to as the ecological awakening.

It is difficult to distinguish all the factors that have contributed to this *ecological awakening*. However, much evidence shows that at the heart of this phenomenon, there is an emotional factor, i.e. a deep concern caused by the vast degradation of the natural environment that became especially evident in the 20th century. Other significant factors that awaken environmental awareness include literature, media reports on resource depletion, UN reports, and alarming scientific studies. Humanistic reflection on the ecological crisis has also conducted to the awakening.

Along with the ecological awakening, one can also speak about environmental awareness that is deepening. An important element in raising this awareness is the belief that man is a part of nature and that the fates of man and nature are inextricably intertwined (O'Sullivan and Taylor, 2004; Caraway, 2018; Veselinovska, Gokik and Veselinovski, 2011). The aim is, therefore, not to change the mindset of individuals, but of entire societies, and create a culture imbued with environmental awareness. The fruits of raising this kind of awareness include a shift in attitudes toward the environment, more sustainable consumer behavior, and active engagement in ecological efforts to protect the environment.

However, the pervasiveness of the ecological threat has also triggered psychological problems referred to as ecological anxiety disorder. Paul Robbins and Sarah A. Moore (2013) have defined eco-anxiety as *either a fearful response to: (1) the negative normative influence of humans on the earth (anthropophobia), or (2) the inherent influence of normative human values within one's own science (autophobia)*. This relatively new phenomenon is already the subject of numerous studies that often connect it with ecological grief, solastalgia, and ecological trauma (Pihkala 2020; Albrecht 2005; Woolbright 2011). While environmental awareness can be seen as a positive phenomenon contributing to pro-environmental attitudes and actions, eco-anxiety is negative. Paradoxically, the anxiety associated with it can be paralyzing, hindering actual efforts to protect nature (Robbins and Moore, 2013). We have delineated a gradual process of becoming aware of the ecological crisis – from ecological awakening, through the deepening of the environmental consciousness to ecological anxiety. This merely illustrates the overall process of growing awareness of individuals and societies as regards the ecological challenges that we are faced with. This paper, however, focuses mainly on ecological awakening and the deepening of environmental awareness. Even though these phenomena have been described, there are hardly any studies on the role of religion in raising environmental awareness. This paper aims to illustrate the role of religion in ecological awakening, with particular emphasis on how Christianity deepens environmental awareness and fosters sustainable attitudes toward nature.

Such attitudes are often called sustainable behaviors or pro-ecological behavior and refer to actions and practices that individuals or groups adopt to minimize their impact on the environment and promote ecological balance, especially the set of deliberate and practical actions that result in the conservation of natural resources: recycling, water conservation, energy saving, ecosystem conservation, composting, and use of public transportation (Corral-Verdugo, 2001; do Paço and Laurett, 2019). Sustainable behaviors have extrinsic and intrinsic sources and consequences. Individuals who engage in such behaviors may gain social recognition, save money (or both), and gain satisfaction and personal well-being. (Corral-Verdugo, Mireles-Acosta, Tapia-Fonllem, Fraijo-Sing, 2011, 96-97).

Religious inspirations for attitudes toward nature can significantly strengthen motivations for sustainable behaviors because of intrinsic moral beliefs.

## 1. Ecological awakening: the beginnings

Studies on the ecological awakening identify seminal figures of this phenomenon. William Vogt, Fairfield Osborn, and Aldo Leopold are most commonly included among them (Brinkley, 2022). It was already in the late 1940s that these authors pointed to serious environmental challenges facing humanity. Among the most significant studies on this topic are: *Road to Survival* (Vogt, 1948), *Our Plundered Planet* (Osborn, 1948), and *A Sand County Almanac* (Leopold, 1949).

It is widely recognized that a series of influential publications contributed to the ecological awakening. This includes both literature that promoted the beauty of nature as well as popular science publications that informed the public about environmental threats. Usually, the beginning of the ecological awakening is associated with the famous book by Rachel Carson *Silent Spring* published in 1962. In the early 1960s, there was also a renewed interest in literature that highlighted the beauty of nature and the imperative of preservation. Above all, this refers to the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1888), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Theodore Parker (1810-1960), and John Muir (1838-1914).

The ecological awakening was also spurred by scientists whose studies alarmed people about the impending disaster facing human civilization. Among the most crucial scientific studies are *World Dynamics* by Jay W. Forrester (1971) and *Limits to Growth* (1972). Global environmental awareness was also deepened by UN environmental initiatives, such as the report by UN Secretary-General, U Thant, *Problems of the Human Environment* (1969). The report was the first to reveal the global character of environmental issues and contributed to the organization of many international summit meetings dedicated to the ecological crisis: the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and the subsequent three global conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Desertification (Amiraslani and Cooper, 2022). Since 1995 there have been the annual United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP). Hypothetical predictions of scientists and UN experts regarding the crisis were confirmed by the oil crisis of the 1970s. During that time, citizens of developed countries, stuck in kilometers-long queues at gas stations, began to realize that fossil fuel resources are not inexhaustible.

The so-called myth of the ecological Native American also contributed to raising environmental awareness (Sadowski, 2016). Here, pro-ecological Native Americans were juxtaposed with representatives of Euro-Atlantic civilization with their irresponsible, selfish, and destructive attitude toward nature. Native Americans were portrayed in popular culture as people living in perfect harmony with nature and using natural resources sustainably. This idea was also popularized in the literature of the 19th-century Romantics and Primitivists, in particular William Henry Hudson (1841-1922), James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) and Francis Parkman (1823-1893). The idea was also rendered in paintings by George Catlin (1796-1872), and Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) (Krech, 1999; Denevan, 1992). Moreover, movies have contributed to popularizing an ecological lifestyle. As part of mass culture, they have influenced the environmental consciousness of entire societies. These are, for example, the film adaptation of Michael Blake's novel *Dances with Wolves*, James Cameron's *Avatar*, and many others.

An important stage of ecological awakening was the initiation of humanistic reflection on the ecological crisis. In the 1970s, humanists and artists joined the global debate dominated by politicians and representatives of the natural sciences, technical sciences, and law. It was then that various branches of environmental philosophy, ecotheology, and so-called land art emerged (Glacken, 1967; Blackstone, 1974; Cobb, 1972; Tiberghien and Green, 1995). The humanistic analysis of the ecological crisis revealed its immense complexity and the diverse conditions of its roots. In their unique way, representatives of the humanities enlarged the circle of those interested in environmental issues. On the other hand, representatives of land art sparked interest in these matters within the artistic milieu. Thus environmental issues became present in the broader public debate.

## 2. The potential of religion in raising environmental awareness

Studies regarding the ecological awakening hardly ever speak about the role of various religious traditions in raising environmental consciousness among their followers. And yet, according to data from the Pew Research Center, in 2010, almost 77% of the human population were followers of the four largest world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. What is more, projections for 2050 indicate that this percentage will increase to over 81% of people (PRC, 2022).

It seems, therefore, that overlooking the contribution of religion is a significant gap in research on the ecological awakening. The report *State of the World 2003* issued by Worldwatch Institute discusses five ecological assets of religions and their potential to build a sustainable world. The report speaks about the following factors that can influence the attitude toward the environment and thus boost environmental consciousness. These are (Gardner, 2003, 154; Posas, 2007):

1. a capacity to shape cosmological views of the world,
2. moral authority,
3. a large number of adherents,
4. major economic means,
5. a potential to generate communities.

The potential to raise environmental consciousness among followers is not a trait of one religion only, but it is characteristic of many religions if not all of them. However, the difference in how this potential is utilized depends on the intellectual capacity, organizational and administrative capabilities, communication tools of various religions, and the trust that the followers place in their leaders. Over millennia, many religions have developed their own methods of shaping the mentality and behavior of their adherents in line with the moral precepts of a given religious tradition. Thus, these methods can and are used to heighten environmental consciousness and shape pro-environmental attitudes among their followers.

Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology is an important source of information regarding the engagement of world religions in the fight against the ecological crisis. It provides extensive data on the approaches of particular religions to nature, presents official statements on this topic, provides copious scientific literature regarding the man-nature relationship from the perspective of a given religion, highlights environmental threads in the sacred texts of various religions, and provides materials for preparing worship services that address environmental problems (FORE, 2024).

Even though this paper focuses on Christian inspirations for the ecological awakening, we can also observe this phenomenon within other religions. Rana Singh, in his examination of the Hindu approach to the ecological crisis, observes that *the absence of religious studies and environmental ethics in South Asia has been a major reason for the underdevelopment of ecological awakening*. However, he points out that the pilgrimages are an important factor in raising environmental consciousness. Also, he emphasizes the significance of the Hellenistic and Hindu inspiration for the Gaia hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, Gaia is the Earth as a Self-Regulating Living Organism: Life regulates life on Earth. Thus, the Gaia hypothesis is congruent with Hindu beliefs that posit the Earth as a mother (Singh, 2007; Lovelock, 1979). Undoubtedly, this perspective fosters the awakening of environmental awareness.

Similar threads of a close relationship between man and nature can be seen in the Buddhist tradition. Becoming aware of this connection leads to an environmental awakening and the engagement of Buddhists in building a sustainable world. This awakening takes place when a Buddhist experiences that the harmony in the surrounding world is being disturbed. There are branches of Buddhism that call for withdrawing in meditation from the transient world of suffering (saṃsāra) to seek release in nirvana. On the other hand, there are Buddhist schools that emphasize the remarkable interconnection of reality in such images as the jeweled net of Indra, where each jewel reflects all the others in the universe. A good example of this perspective are the Zen gardens in Eastern Asia that illustrate the fullness of Buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha) in the natural world (Tucker and Grim, 1997, xxvi).

Similarly, in the Muslim tradition, some studies emphasize the connection between religious beliefs and ecological awakening. The Muslim tradition highlights man's relationship with nature, and stresses that humanity is an integral part of the web of life, directly contributing to raising environmental awareness (Özdemir, 2003, 4). In the Muslim tradition, one has been long aware that *no doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qu'ran in this reflective observation of nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that which nature is regarded a symbol, and then to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and the universe* (Iqbal, 1958, 8-9; Özdemir, 2003, 8).

The emergence of many ecological movements with religious backgrounds proves that ecological awakening has indeed occurred among world religions' followers. Members of these movements engage in ecological protection driven by religious motivations. These ecological movements encompass representatives of a given religious tradition or various traditions, all concerned about the condition of the planet (Allison, 2007; Sadowski, 2013). These movements not only focus on raising the environmental awareness of their followers but also undertake many ecologically-focused projects that aim at improving the state of our planet.

### 3. Christian initiatives to instigate ecological awakening

Among all religions, it seems that Christianity has contributed the most to raising environmental awareness among its followers, and it has also inspired other religions in this regard. This is the result of several factors:

1. Christianity has the largest number of followers. According to data from 2010, Christians make up 31.4% of the world's population, and projections for 2050 say that this percentage will remain steady (PRC, 2022).
2. The tradition of education is deeply rooted in Christianity. That is why there are so many Christian educational institutions in almost every country. Churches that represent various Christian denominations run not only kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and universities, but also miscellaneous training courses. The Catholic Church is a non-governmental organization that operates the largest number of universities in the

world. According to the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education, the Church runs over 1300 universities worldwide (Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2024; ACCU, 2024). Students at these universities are taught the Christian perspective on the ecological crisis, and research is conducted to accurately diagnose the crisis and formulate strategies for overcoming it.

3. Over the centuries, Christian denominations have developed their means of communicating with their followers. Among the most important methods of addressing the faithful are various forms of official documents. For example, the highest representative of the Catholic Church, the Pope, apart from ordinary speeches may also issue exhortations, encyclicals, bulls, etc. The case is similar with the Orthodox Church whose honorary representative is the Patriarch of Constantinople. He may address all Orthodox Christians through pastoral letters and appeals. The Protestant churches do not have one leader; in 1948 they established the World Council of Churches. The Council issues appeals and declarations to the representatives of the churches affiliated with WCC (WCC, 2024). The above means of communicating with the faithful have been used for decades to broaden the environmental consciousness of Christians.
4. In the Christian tradition, the faithful have been taught catechism lessons, Bible study groups, spiritual workshops, retreats, and other formative spiritual practices. All these methods are now also being used to raise environmental awareness.
5. The Catholic Church has a unique status that allows it to operate internationally in a way that no other religion can. The Holy See uses it to put forward ecological issues in international debate. This is possible because *the Holy See officially acts as the Vatican City. The state was established as a result of the Lateran Treaties and Concordat with the Italian state of 11 February 1929. This authorizes the Holy See to conduct diplomatic relations with countries and international organizations. The Vatican City is not a member of the UN, but it has the status of a permanent observer, which gives it the right to participate in all sessions of the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the UN Economic and Social Council* (Sitarz, 2014, 275).

All the above-mentioned forms of communication used by Christian leaders to address the faithful have been used to raise environmental awareness. We shall now present the most crucial documents in which Christian spiritual leaders at various levels speak about issues related to the ecological crisis and appeal for respect for God's creation. We shall also discuss important publications that, from a Christian perspective, deal with man's abuses of creation, and show the ecological crisis from a religious point of view.

### 3.1. Statements

The thesis expressed by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) was an important element in heightening environmental awareness among Christians. The Pope pointed to the necessity to address contemporary problems of man collectively, and warned against solving social and economic problems separately (Paul VI, 1967, no 14). Some experts on the concept of sustainable development say that it was inspired by the Pope's words, which drew Christians' attention to environmental issues (Papuziński, 2007).

One of the first religious ecological initiatives on a global scale was the so-called Assisi Declaration. In September 1986, Pope John Paul II invited representatives of the world's religions to Assisi: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. The leaders issued a declaration to their followers to care for the planet (Assisi Declaration, 1986). This was most probably the first joint appeal of religious leaders to their global community of believers that drew attention to humanity's ecological crisis.

Another important initiative to promote environmental awareness of American Christians was the report *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* issued in 1987 by the Commission for Racial Justice United Church of Christ. The report's signatories called on the government, industrial companies, and religious communities to take action to protect human health and care for the environment (United Church of Christ, 1987).

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, representatives of many Christian denominations in various countries addressed believers with pastoral letters and appeals for the respect of nature and the prevention of the negative effects of environmental degradation. Among the earliest documents of this kind, there are statements by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (1988), the Polish Bishops' Conference (1989), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1993).

A special role in raising environmental awareness was played by representatives of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church who issued joint statements. The leaders of these churches are esteemed not only by their followers but also by many people who do not identify with Christianity. Thus, they drew the attention of the global community to the dangers related to the ecological crisis. In addition, they encouraged actions to overcome the crisis, and emphasized the moral dimension of human relations with nature. Among these statements, there were joint appeals by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and successive Popes (John Paul II and Bartholomew I, 2002; Benedict XVI and Bartholomew I, 2006; Francis and Bartholomew I, 2014).

It is impossible to enumerate all pivotal statements by Christian leaders in which they addressed believers with warnings about the ecological crisis and where they gave incentives to counter this challenge. However, the following statements seem particularly important in terms of raising environmental awareness: John Paul II (1990), Bartholomew I (1997), John Paul II (2001), Benedict XVI (2010).

Special attention should be drawn to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015). It is unique because the impending ecological crisis is its central theme. Also, environmental issues have never been the subject of a document of such high rank as the papal encyclical. Its significance in terms of raising environmental awareness is evidenced, among other things, by research conducted in the USA by the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University (Maibach et al., 2015; Gozum et al., 2023; Kania, 2020). The research was comparative and did not involve only Christians or Catholics alone but encompassed the entire American society. The first part of the research was conducted between February and March 2015, i.e. a few months before the encyclical was issued (May 24, 2015). The subsequent study was between September and October 2015, i.e., soon after Pope Francis visited the USA and his address to the United Nations General Assembly regarding climate change (September 25, 2015). The results of the research were published in a report with a telling title: *The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis Changed the Conversation about Global Warming*.

The report explicitly states that Pope's encyclical and his visit to the USA along with his address at the UN, had a significant impact on Americans and changed their environmental awareness. For example, 1) many Americans (17%) and Catholics (35%) say the Pope's position on global warming has influenced their views about the issue; 2) more Americans overall (+6 points), and more Catholics (+13 points), became very or extremely sure that global warming is happening; 3) more Americans overall and American Catholics think that people in developing countries (+15 and +17 points, respectively) and the world's poor (+12 and +20 points, respectively) will be harmed by global warming a great deal or a moderate amount; 4) more Americans (+7 points) and more Catholics (+8 points) say that the issue of global warming has become very or extremely important to them personally (Maibach et al., 2015, 5-6).

It is worth emphasizing that the Pope's encyclical became a catalyst for individuals, local Catholic communities, and leaders of other religious traditions to engage in the combat against the ecological crisis. For example, at the initiative of Pope Francis, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (now called *Laudato si' Movement*) was created. It addressed the participants of the Climate Change Conference (COP21). The petition issued was signed by over 900,000 people from almost every part of the world. In order to fight climate change, the Catholic Climate Covenant was formed and over 17,000 Catholic parishes in the USA have been involved in it (Sadowski, 2017, 46-47). Encouraged by Pope Francis, representatives of other religions addressed the participants of COP21, pointing to the necessity to undertake brave actions as part of the so-called Paris Agreement (December 12, 2015). This is well illustrated by the statement of spiritual leaders who represented the largest religious communities at global, continental, and national levels. The continental leaders represented Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania. The statement was signed also by representatives of various religious traditions from 47 countries. The statement declares: *We as religious leaders stand together to express deep concern for the consequences of climate change on the Earth and its people, all entrusted, as our faiths reveal, to our common care. Climate change is indeed a threat to life. Life is a precious gift we have received and that we need to care for* (Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders, 2015).

The above data show that numerous religious ecological initiatives have significantly contributed to raising environmental awareness and its growth among a large part of the global population.

### 3.2. Publications

While discussing the role of statements and publications in raising environmental awareness, we should stress their twofold feedback. On the one hand, the authors of religious publications on environmental issues inspire believers, including religious leaders, who then undertake pro-environmental action or issue official documents that make people sensitive to the so-called ecological issue. On the other hand, documents published by the leaders are an inspiration for scholars who identify with a given religious tradition. As a result, they conduct studies on the complex phenomenon of the ecological crisis. These studies often include a religious perspective, and their findings not only contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon but deepen environmental awareness of religious milieus.

We shall only discuss those publications that mention environmental issues taking into account a Christian perspective. Moreover, we shall only choose select works that have been published since 1970 as their impact on environmental awareness seems particularly significant. These publications emerged when widespread awareness of the ecological crisis was only beginning to take root in the societies of developed countries. The vast body of literature on environmental issues from various religious perspectives is beyond the scope of a single academic paper. The author, therefore, will discuss publications that, in his opinion, have contributed most to the popularization of environmental issues, thus raising and deepening environmental awareness.

Christian trailblazers of environmental awareness include those who even at the beginning of the 20th century spoke about environmental problems from a religious perspective. These are: *The Holy Earth* by L. H. Bailey (1915), *The Two Creation Stories in Genesis: A Study of Their Symbolism* by J. Forrester-Brown (1920), *The Eleventh Commandment* by W. C. Lowdermilk (1933), *Nature, Men and God* by W. Temple (1934), *The Great Chain of Being* by A. O. Lovejoy (1936), *Nature and Scripture* by C. Van Til (1946), *Inspiration and Revelation*

in the New Testament by H. W. Robinson (1946), *Nature, Also, Mourns for a Lost Good* by P. Tillich (1948), and Dodd 1946a; Dodd 1946b.

Among the extensive literature at the intersection of ecology and Christianity published in the 1950s, the following works are noteworthy: *A Theology for Earth* by J. Sittler (1954); *The Work of Creation* by K. Barth (1958); *Nature and Sacrament* by P. Tillich (1957); *Religious Approach to Nature* by W. H. Dew (1950), Galloway 1951; Heschel 1951 and Rust 1953.

The most important publications of the 1960s are: *Man and Earth* by P. Tillich (1963); *Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation* by L. Gilkey (1965); *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* by C. Glacken (1967); *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* by L. White (1967), Williams 1962; Sittler 1964; Evdokimov 1965; Baer 1966a; Baer 1966b; Moule 1964 and Wallace-Hadrill 1968.

Readers interested in these issues may reach for resources that provide a more comprehensive range of literature in this field. There are books and websites with extensive lists of publications that show the Christian approach to environmental issues. Among them, the most important are: 1) the revised edition of John Cobb's *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (edition of 2021); 2) Joseph K. Sheldon's *Rediscovery of Creation: A Bibliographical Study of the Church's Response to the Environmental Crisis* (1992); 3) Wesley Wildman's website with a long list of works from this field (Wildman and Demm, 2003); 4) Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology's website with a broad bibliography of publications on Christianity and ecology. The website provides a comprehensive list of literature on environmental issues from the perspective of various religious traditions (FORE, 2024).

## Conclusion

The environmental awakening and systematic deepening of environmental awareness are undeniable. The vast majority of people realize the impending urgency and threat of the ecological crisis. Even though there are those who question the anthropogenic nature of climate change, few negate the existence of the crisis itself. Its manifestations are evident. They are:

- 1) depletion of natural resources, and fossil fuels in particular
- 2) global pollution of soil, water, and air
- 3) ongoing deforestation and desertification
- 4) global warming
- 5) rapidly increasing waste dumps

The ecological crisis's negative effects on both men and animals are also obvious.

Experiencing the ecological crisis implies that we are aware of it. While analyzing the phenomenon of ecological awakening and systematically nurturing environmental awareness, it is worth stressing the role of religion in this regard. Recognizing the efforts of spiritual leaders and the numerous initiatives of various religious communities reflects an appreciation for actions that have yielded specific, positive results in fostering sustainable attitudes toward the natural environment (Dall'Oglio, 2020; Sadowski, 2020; Lubowicki, 2020). Moreover, acknowledging numerous ecological initiatives of religious communities is a good point of departure for building a broader coalition to create a more sustainable world. We can quote Prof. Mary E. Tucker, the co-founder of Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology: religions cannot overcome the ecological crisis on their own but overcoming it without the involvement of religions is impossible.

Even though this paper focuses on the contribution of the Christian tradition in raising and deepening environmental awareness, it by no means aims at diminishing the contributions of other religions. Since we identify with Christianity and follow research on its relationship with ecology, we have decided to choose the perspective that is closest to us. However, we are aware that this study is only one perspective of a broader, interreligious mosaic. We hope that people who identify with other religious traditions will undertake to show how these traditions have contributed to raising environmental consciousness. Thus, they will complement our knowledge regarding the contribution of the world's religions in stirring this consciousness among their followers and shaping ecologically-aware attitudes that will add to a more sustainable world for future generations.

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