

THE RELIGION-ENVIRONMENTALISM NEXUS AND GLOBALIZATION

WHANYUNG KIM*

This research paper explores the nature of the links between religion, especially Christianity, and environmentalism in the age of globalization. In responding to the ecocrisis, Christianity is redefining itself as it interacts with secular environmentalism and other religions. From these interactions, two types of responses toward environmentalism have emerged: reactive and adaptive. This paper analyzes these responses and attempts to explain their causes. It is shown that the idiosyncratic characteristics of different branches of Christianity contributed to the contrasting responses. This paper then investigates the domestic and international sources of the divergent responses, which are arguably as important as the religious doctrines and values per se.

1. INTRODUCTION

Westernization, modernization, and development are the cognates that describe the West's attempt to mold the non-West in its own image. Globalization is both the most recent and the most generic term to describe this event. Modern history has been a history of the West's venture to globalize its institutions by violent, coercive, and peaceful means. There have been successive waves of globalization originating from the West, with each wave promoting and implementing a core ideology. The first wave of globalization that began with Europe's "discovery" of the rest of the world diffused Christianity. The second wave propagated secular ideologies of nationalism and republicanism along with associated ideas of sovereignty and territoriality. Capitalist liberal democracy, the foundation of the third wave of globalization, has shaped much of the world history in the twentieth century. Under the current fourth wave of globalization in the late twentieth century, nationalism and liberal capitalism are still paramount and are undergoing a process of both deepening and further diffusion. In addition, environmentalism has made a debut in the fourth wave and may even become a predominant ideology of the early third millennium.¹

Acid rain, climate change, desertification, overexploitation of resources, stratospheric ozone depletion, greenhouse gas emissions, reduction of the rain forests, and the continuous destruction of biodiversity exemplify the status of the endangered earth. Considering the seriousness of the ecocrisis, disparaging environmentalism as needless alarmism, as the critiques of environmentalism often do, is "unrealistic." The environmental crisis is already on the top of international agendas and environmentalism is changing the nature of international relations as it enhances the role of non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and multilateral negotiations and treaties vis-a-vis the nation-state.

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¹The developing world suspects that environmentalism will be a foundation of the 21st century imperialism. See Lindzen 1998: 13-14.

Throughout the three previous waves, religion has been increasingly alienated from other realms of society under the influence of secularism. In terms of numerical power and social influence, religions have certainly declined as was predicted by major social thinkers. However, both Christianity and non-Western religions have also managed to survive the impacts of the secularization. Christianity succeeded in taking root in non-Western areas. Traditional religions in non-Western areas have survived the impact of the West and Christian intrusion. They are reemerging in virtually all parts of the world, in some cases under the form of fundamentalism. The renaissance of religions under the fourth wave will depend on their ability to survive amid some contradictory trends of re-integration and de-linkage. To reinvigorate themselves, among other things, religions have to cope with the challenges from the environment. To do so, religions have to accommodate and compete with secular environmentalism.

Despite secularizing trends, religion is a factor in the international politics of environmentalism for two reasons. First, although the world may be moving in the direction of total secularization, the level of secularization is different in respective countries and international regions. Religion affects international relations when one party is not secularized. Second, religions may succeed in arresting the process of secularization and roll it back. Or they may fail altogether. However, as religion attempts a return, other realms of society will be influenced by this attempt.

In theory and practice, religion and environmentalism are already involved in competitive and conflictual interactions. Religions have joined the global environmental activism. Religion-based grassroots environmentalist movements exist in all world religions, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.² There is also a theoretical dimension of the import of religion in environmental matters, with respect to the nature of the ecocrisis, especially its cause and solution. Some people believe that the ecocrisis has economic origins and that it can be overcome by technological solutions. Others are convinced that environmentalism and environmental activism need a religious foundation because the ecological crisis is mainly a crisis of ethical values (Fenyvesi 1997: 58; Schneider 1998: A10).³

This nexus between religion and secular ideology is not new. Christianity and non-Western religions have interacted with these waves of globalization and supporting ideologies. Religions have affected the processes of nation-building, political development, and economic growth. Religions participate in the historical processes because they are more than just theoretical bodies to understand the universe or to differentiate the sacred from the profane. Religions are forces of social cohesion and change and are intermeshed with other realms of society. Therefore, just as in the past, the global response to the environmental challenge has been and will be influenced by the religions.

The religion-secular ideology nexus is affected by fundamental shifts in the international system. The first three waves of globalization were forces of separation and integration. With the decline of the idea of Christendom and the rise of the nation-state, the domestic was created and then separated from the international. Similarly, the economic, the political, and the legal were differentiated from each other. Globalization has also been a force that integrated pairs which were previously separate entities, such as the

²See Coward, ed. 1995; Johnson 1995: 32-6.

³For instance, sustainable development, widely recognized as the remedy for ecocrisis, necessitates a value change that involves religion.

nation and the state, science and technology, and love and marriage. Current wave of globalization is blurring the demarcation lines and is altering the relationship between these pairs.

This paper purports to explore the nature of the links between religion and environmentalism. To analyze the current status of the nexus, this paper focuses on Christianity. Such a focus is methodologically sound because Christianity, which has the largest religious following in the world, has been involved in all four waves of globalization. In addition, because Christian responses to the environmental crisis are paralleled in other religions, this analysis can be a basis for further comparative study. In responding to the ecocrisis, just as other religions, Christianity has to redefine itself and interact with secular environmentalism and other world religions.

From these interactions, two types of response toward environmentalism have emerged: reactive and adaptive. In reacting to secular ideologies, Christianity has made similarly contradictory choices in the former waves of globalization. Paradoxically, it fostered and hindered the growth of nationalism and capitalist liberal democracy. It seems to have already assumed no less controversial role in the fourth phase of globalization. The following sections will analyze these contradictory responses and attempt to explain their causes. The intra-religious variables that are shaped by the idiosyncratic characteristics of different religions contributed to the contrasting responses. This paper will then investigate the domestic and international sources of the divergent responses, which are arguably as important as the religious doctrines and values *per se*.

2. REACTIVE RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

The nature of the connection between Christianity and environmentalism under the current ecological crisis is a contested issue. As for the Christian potential for re-defining itself in a more environmental-friendly direction, the students of religion are divided. The issue has been debated at both the theological-theoretical level and the historical-practical level. The reasoning of the environmentalist critique of Christianity is that the Judeo-Christian tradition does not even recognize environmental problems, or worse, it has legitimized environmental exploitation and degradation.⁴ The Bible, especially the Book of Genesis has been interpreted as the origin of the current environmental degradation (Benstein 1995: 146).⁵ In Genesis, having created the universe and man, God commands

⁴The attempt to link Christianity and the environmental crisis relates to some fundamental questions in social science, such as the problem of measuring the strength of a correlation, the problem of weighing relative importance of different factors, and interaction among variables. Christianity has been the dominant religion of the West—recognized as a leading actor in ecocrisis. Because of the close connection between European expansion and Christianity—especially in its early phase, it is difficult to remove religion from the list of candidate variables that led to the ecological degradation. If religion was a factor, how important was it? What is the nature of religion's interaction with other social and historical variables? To support the argument that Christianity is the prime cause of the ecocrisis, it is necessary to prove that ideas are more important than material factors, such as technological and economic factors and that Christian ideas have prevailed over other rival systems of ideas.

⁵Lynn White was an early proponent of such view. In *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, published in 1967 as an article in *Science*, he argued that dominion over the earth's resources with an exploit mentality has a Christian origin (Livingstone 1994: 24-5). An empirical study found substantial support for White's thesis. See Eckberg & Blocker 1989.

man to be fruitful and increase in number and to fill the earth and subdue it. The critics have interpreted this passage as an exhortation to dominate nature. All probable causes of the ecocrisis have been associated with Christianity. For instance, some Christian scholars also point to the association between Christianity and excessive consumption as a factor in economic degradation.⁶

Conservative Christians are not inevitably hostile to environmentalism. Studies have shown that individuals that espouse religious orthodoxy are not necessarily monolithic in their views and have little political uniformity (Davis 1996: 250). However, the dynamics of a group is different from the individuals and behavioral consistency may be achieved at that level. In addition, the elite Christian group may be unwavering unlike the non-elite group. Indeed, views hostile to secular environmentalism arose from Christian groups with orthodox orientations. On theological, historical, and scientific grounds, the attempt to connect Christianity and the ecocrisis has been refuted by conservative Christian groups.

Conservative Christians' hostility towards environmentalism stems from their attachment to the doctrinal orthodoxy. They would not relinquish the centrality of God's grace necessary for the salvation of man. They have been traditionally antagonistic toward easy man-made schemes of perfection, such as Marxism, environmentalism, and Christian Science (Yancey 1995: 96). Christianity is based on a revelation and environmentalism certainly was not part of it. Possibly environmental-friendly messages are scattered throughout the Bible but are not a central part of the Christian gospel. Unless some positional adjustments are made on the part of either Christianity or environmentalism, they are not readily compatible. Even for Christians who are willing to accommodate environmentalism, anti-Christian outlooks, incompatibility of goals, and non-Christian aspects of some environmental issues and secular environmentalism are difficult to overcome (Allitt 1998: 265-6).

Christians are suspicious of belief systems that are not institutionalized religions — such as neo-shamanism and environmentalism — but which can fully function as religions or at least display some pseudo-religious characteristics. Christians are especially concerned with environmentalism's connection to polytheism, pantheism, female deity worship, and evolutionism. Animistic belief of native religions and the concept of Gaia that celebrates the divinity of the Earth conflict with monotheism. Similarly, an emphasis on a closer humanity-nature connection based on evolutionism negates creationism. Orthodox Judaism shares an identical concern because paganism's concept of Mother Earth is incompatible with the Judaic notion of Father King (Schwartz 1995: 438-9).

Christian rebuttal can be made on a historical ground. Large-scale degradation of nature took place only after the Bible had lost much of its influence (Harrison 1999: 99-100). From this view, secular aspects of the Western civilization rather than its religious aspects are responsible for the environmental crisis. Major environmental degradation occurred when rival factors — material factors and secular ideas — became more pronounced. It was the industrial revolution that changed the relationship between human and nature from partnership to domination and exploitation (Wall 1997: 995). Likewise, after the decline of religion, secularly based ideas came to the fore. The Western dualism that separates subject and object may have led to the pollution of nature and the exploitation of the Third World (McFague 1997: 186-7). In sum, the secular value system has to

⁶See Coward, ed. 1995.

assume primary responsibility.

To this type of Christian reply, secular environmentalists can rejoinder by referring to the superiority of secular environmentalism in promoting the pro-environmental cause. History shows that institutionalization of environmental concern occurred in the secularized context after the decline of religion. For instance, the practice of forestry evolved from the rationalism of the Enlightenment that replaced religion (Binkley 1998: 133). Environmentalists may also mention that the structure of Western exploitation of the world for which Christianity prepared the foundation has been maintained even after secularization and that environmental-hostile Christian values have been embedded in society even in the secularized context.

The Christian position that is hostile or indifferent to the environmental cause can find allies not only among historians and social scientists but also among some natural scientists who argue that the results from the researches on environmental degradation are still inconclusive. For instance, they maintain that scientific evidence has not proven how global warming is caused.⁷ Such argument would support ecologically unconcerned Christians because if the ecocrisis is not such a pressing issue, they could devote their energy to their main concern or other issues: salvation and other urgent issues such as the decline of the family, drug addiction, and juvenile delinquency.⁸

3. ADAPTIVE RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

Christians who adopted an adaptive posture have tried to steer Christianity toward an environment-friendly direction by finding pro-environmentalist passages in the Bible, reinterpreting seemingly hostile passages, constructing a new environmental theology, and not hesitating to learn from other religions and secular systems of thought. Unlike their brethren, more progressive and socially concerned Christians tend to be adaptive and active in their response to the ecocrisis and environmentalism. The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation was signed by one hundred fifty Christian leaders (Frame 1994: 76). Christians concerned with ecological degradation, especially those from the National Council of Churches, recognize the Christian responsibility leading to the ecocrisis and admit that North America is the primary culprit of global warming ("NCC fights global warming" 1998: 813-4; "New focus" 1992: 359).

Eco-conscious Christians welcome dialogue with secular environmentalism. They conclude that the spiritual aspect of environmentalism can be looked upon as a positive aspect by Christians since it indicates a new interest in religion (Connor 1993: 25). More independent-minded Christians want to establish a separate Christianity-based environmentalism and take the lead in environmental activism. They think that Christians should

⁷See for instance, Nelson 1997b: 76; 1997c: 69.

⁸With regard to the Christian-environmentalism nexus, diverse positions in the scientific community are found. Some scientists are reluctant to mingle religious and scientific positions in the first place. Others favor cooperation between religion and environmentalism. A perspective that is hostile towards both religion and environmentalism can also be found. From such a point of view, both environmentalists and the Bible prophets are wrong and pseudo-scientific (Simon 1995: 19-20). This opposition stems from the fact that both radical environmentalism and apocalypticism are not based on scientific methods. Therefore, Milne (1993) argues that supposedly scientific approaches formulated by such groups as Greenpeace are not really scientific at all, but a possible combination of moral philosophy and religion.

embrace environmentalism because the belated response will lead to the hijacking of the environmental movement by sentimentalists and pagans (Kantzer 1994: 33).

For reactive as well as adaptive responses to environmentalism, the Bible is the initial locus of discussion. Christian environmentalists have searched for the theological evidence that Christianity and environmentalism are compatible with each other. Genesis is arguably the most controversial text in the Bible for the Christianity-environmentalism nexus. The adaptive position is that Genesis teaches man's duty of stewardship of the earth and that it is humanity's responsibility to preserve nature.⁹ Responding to the argument that other religions and cultures show more respect to nature than Christianity, environment-conscious Christians found the biblical foundation for Christian environmentalism: nature has to be respected because it is created by God (Snyder 1995: 15).

The rest of the Bible, beyond Genesis, is in fact filled with environment-friendly passages. It is because the theology of Judaism itself evolved as the Hebrew people interacted with their neighbors and underwent historical developments. For instance, the Book of Joel does not follow the tradition of separating humans from nature but rather links them as Yahweh's creations (Simkins 1993: 435-452). Having thus established an ecological understanding of the Bible, the pro-environmentalist Christian lobby has quoted the Bible to support biodiversity and wilderness protection.

This Christian environmental activism can be supported by a new theological orientation. Environmentalist Christians believe that an environment-friendly theology has to be constructed to cope with the current ecocrisis. To do so, the Christian tradition itself can offer materials for the theological reconstruction. For instance, it is possible to extend the concept of sin. Traditionally, natural disasters were seen as a reflection of God's anger at humankind's sins. The new theological orientation proposes man's repentance and reparations for damage done to the Earth ("The abuse of nature is a sin" 1997: 43; Becker 1992: 161-3).¹⁰ Similarly, *koinonia* — Christian fellowship or communion with God and fellow Christians — is another Christian concept whose meaning can be extended to incorporate the fellowship between man and nature for the sake of Christian environmentalism (Valianatos 1997: 200).

Christians can collaborate with Jews to explore pro-environmentalist aspects of the Old Testament. However, it is the task of Christians to define the relationship between the New Testament theology and environmentalism. Because Jesus and his followers believed in the imminent end of the world by God's intervention, the New Testament does not elaborate on man-nature relations. However, Christians with environmental orientation believe that the teachings of Jesus can illuminate environmental issues. For instance, it is argued that considering the general tendency in Jesus' teachings that espoused justice, ecojustice is a logical conclusion in this era (Wink 1993: 477).

In constructing Christian environmentalism, some denominational differences exist. For instance, Catholics are in some respects more favorably disposed than Protestants in building an environmental theology. They can cite St. Francis of Assisi as the first Christian thinker who explored the intimate links between creation and creatures.¹¹ In the modern period, they can draw Catholic environmentalist ideas from Thomas Merton who

⁹See Barlow 1996; Clifford 1992; Harrison 1999; Livingstone 1994; Neff 1992; Neuhaus 1997; Sider 1995; Steffen 1992; Tubbs 1994; DeWitt 1994.

¹⁰According to Lai (1999), Paul Tillich developed the doctrine of nature's participation in the fall and salvation of the world.

¹¹See Nangle 1998; Dreyer 1991.

set the basis of environmentalism (Rausch 1994: 12). One of the strengths Merton's of ideas in building Catholic environmentalism is that his theology accommodates Eastern religions which are allegedly more environment-friendly than Christianity.

Orthodox Christianity's potential for religion-based environmentalism is no less substantial. Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch of the world's 250 million Orthodox Christians, is called the Green Patriarch because he advocates unification of nations aimed at unilaterally curbing climate change (Newsome 1999: 15-7). Not only its leadership but also the theological aspects of Orthodox Christianity can foster the environmental cause. For instance, the Orthodox theology of self-control centering on the concept of *enkratia* can serve the Christian environmentalist cause. However, the implementation of the Orthodox Church's vision of environmentalism is not going to be easy. Central and Eastern European countries produced about a fifth of all greenhouse gases (Zlinsky 1997: 179) and the Orthodox Church has to deal with an ecological condition which is no better than in other regions. The ecocrisis is thus a challenge and opportunity for Orthodox Christians. The resurgence of the Orthodox Church in post-communist Eastern Europe,¹² and its preemptive espousal of the environmental cause may check the rise of secular environmental activism.

Paradoxically, religions and cultures of the world not also share a number of universals but also display a number of unique attributes. Because of the universals, religions of the world will face a similar degree of difficulty or facility in coping with ecological degradation. At the same time, each religion-environmentalism nexus will be unique because of some idiosyncratic aspects of each religion: some religious attributes may be more environment-friendly than others. This line of thought leads to the idea of selective borrowing from other religions. People who are not satisfied with the existing form of Christianity have argued that other traditional religions have much to offer to the post-modern world, especially in the cases of environment-related values and practices.

The idea is that Christianity should adopt environment-friendly theology from other religions (Koyama 1992: 80-90) and that the linear and progressive philosophy of the West can be complemented by a cyclical theology inspired by non-Western religions that reflects the sacred and natural process (Kwok 1992: 304-7). Not only secular environmentalists, but also Christians with adaptive posture have been interested in the environment-related ideas from both world religions and primal religions. Eastern religions — especially, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism — have been considered as endowed with religious values that are environment-friendly. For instance, it has been argued that Hinduist and Buddhist groups exemplify an ecological conscience through their practice of vegetarianism, worship and care for animals, and a system of spiritual constraint (Tobias 1997: 14-9). Similarly, the positive function of the Hindu cattle complex has been explored (Harris 1992: 261-76). In the case of Buddhism, the ethics of “non-injury” is contemplated as having an environmental potential.

The West's view of the East in general and Eastern religions in particular has been influenced by the power relationship between the West and the East. For Enlightenment thinkers, the East provided superior examples by which to criticize their own society. With the emergence of the West, however, the West's view of the East became more critical. Western social science, especially functionalism, has explored the positive and negative functions played by religions in modern societies. The non-Western religions were

¹²See Bria 1998.

viewed as a factor impeding modernization and development. For instance, Weber considered the religion of China as a major influence obstructing change because it emphasized harmony with the world rather than promoting active mastery of it (Weber 1951: 226-249).

Under the impact of the West, non-Western countries initiated the processes of modernization and development. However, the results have widely varied. In addition to economic explanations, the religious and cultural sources in the variance have been explored in the Weberian tradition. Most remarkably, a number of studies have used cultural variable to explain the East Asian success stories, especially that of Japan.¹³ The idea is that East Asian religious and cultural values are compatible with modernity. For instance, the US-imposed constitution in Japan included many concepts harmonious with Buddhism (Peek 1995: 527). The argument now seems to be expanded to include the relationship between East Asian values and environmentalism: the Japanese philosophical and religious tradition represents a commitment of eco-centrism (Shaner & Duval 1989: 197-214). The same line of argument has been applied to the case of Buddhism of Korea. Korean Buddhism's monastic tradition can offer a model for the environmental crisis (Moon 1997: 42-55). Likewise, in the United States, EcoBuddhism was proposed as a modern American Buddhist response to environmental problems (Harris 1995: 199-211).

The idea of linking environmentalism with traditional religions faces a number of theoretical and practical problems. Eastern religions not only failed to nourish modernization and industrialization but also failed to guide them in an environment-friendly direction when these processes began. In fact, it is doubtful whether these religions were environment-friendly in the first place prior to the impact of the West. For instance, Buddhism has not historically been particularly oriented toward an environmental ethic (Gross 1997: 333-53). Traditional religions certainly contain a number of environment-friendly aspects. However, the central messages of these religions are only remotely related to environmental issues and were not originally intended to handle ecological issues. Indeed, environmentalism and environmental activism are essentially modern and Western.

Along with their interests in non-Western world religions, environmentalists of the West — secular and religious — have been interested in the environmental potential of primal religions such as animism, Native American religions, and shamanism. The tendency to esteem primal societies and religions is deeply rooted in the idea of the noble savage in the Western tradition. New religions — syncretistic religions that combine attributes from traditional and primal religions — are also considered as being pro-environment. Ancient and indigenous cultures show greater respect for nature and their ancient gospel of the earth teaches intimate connection between human beings and the environment (Bequette 1993: 27-9; Hayden 1996: 38-9). For instance, many environmentalists have been interested in the spiritual aspects of trees (Brower 1994: 34-6) and they may be helped by the ideas from animism.

A number of Western states, especially the United States and Australia — have important aborigine population. The existence of aborigines affects the religion-environmentalism relations in these countries. Having idealized pre-Columbian Indian life, the radical environmentalism has appropriated Native American spirituality.¹⁴ Interest in native reli-

¹³See Bellah 1957: 107-131; Morishima 1982: 1-9, 194-201.

¹⁴See Taylor 1997; Booth 1990.

gion is not confined to secular environmentalism. Some Christians boldly argue that Native American philosophy should be a source for developing a new theology (Tinker 1992: 312-24). However, the link between native religions and environmentalism is not without problems because some aspects of native religions actually conflict with some principles of environmentalism. For instance, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act may give Native Americans the right to hunt bald eagles for religious purposes (Peysner 1994: 58-9). The danger of environmentalist reinterpretation of native religions and societies is to attribute an image of "all good things went together" to them. Even a cursory historical review destroys such an image.¹⁵

Prior to the emergence of environmental issues, many people of the West became interested in pagan ideas. Despite the religious hegemony of Christianity during the last two millennia, paganism has resurfaced. The new paganism that resurrects pre-Christian European religions has emerged and it has assumed a role in environmental activism (Samuel 1996: 373-6). This new Western paganism has strong links to feminism. Radical environmental activism has relied on a feminist critique of western economy, science and technology (Jackson 1995: 124-40). Because economic globalization is impoverishing women and worsening the environmental crisis, the triad relationship between feminism, primal religion, and environmentalism may develop in positive ways.¹⁶ Worldwide, business projects are worsening the environmental condition of sacred religious sites and are opposed by environmentalist and religious groups.¹⁷ Grassroots environmental organizations (GEOs) which are proliferating in the Third World are often headed by women and are viewed by respective states with hostility or indifference (Gardner 1995: 200-44).

4. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF REACTIVE AND ADAPTIVE RESPONSES

The previous sections dealt with the religious sources of influence that effected the choice of response. This section will explore the domestic and international sources of reactive and adaptive responses. The strategic choice made by religion is influenced not only by intra-religious condition but also by the domestic and international contexts. Regardless of the historical condition, the nature of the domestic system, or the international system, politics and religions both pursue survival and expansion. To survive and to expand, politics and religions have to compete and cooperate with each other as they deal with new challenges. When a new challenge, new anomaly, or a new factor appears three options are available: ignore it, revise one's paradigm, or build a new paradigm (Kuhn 1996: 52-91). Religions support social reproduction or social transformation as they pursue survival and expansion. Faced with the challenge from the nature, nation-states and religions are already choosing and toying with these three available options.

¹⁵For instance, in case of the Chaco Canyon Anasazi people of the U.S. southwest practices cannibalism as recently as A.D. 900 (Nelson 1997a: 64).

¹⁶We have to make a distinction between modern feminism and feministic aspects of traditional societies and religions. Traditional religions may display a number of feministic attributes. However, these religions ultimately support male-dominated societies. For instance, the Kogi Indian culture has a goddess-based cosmology yet displays many misogynic aspects. See Dodd 1997.

¹⁷See Agnew 1997; Baum 1992; Geist 1993; Ingram 1993; McLeod 1994; Pearce 1994; Sojourner 1993.

The survival and expansion of states and religions will depend on the soundness of their choice.

Approximately twenty thousand forms of Christianity are currently being practiced (Schreier 1993: 50). These different variations of Christianity have survived the test of history, at least up to now. They maintain certain theological and social positions because these supported their institutional survival. In the first three waves of globalization, religions have negotiated their identity in the world of nationalism and liberal capitalism. Under the current wave of globalization, they have to choose a position on environmental issues. The strategy to connect religion with ecology is sound but is not without problems. Progressive and adaptive position leads to an expansion of agenda and an overload of goals.¹⁸ However, the reverse, the dissociation strategy is equally problematic. Reactive position's emphasis on single strong message — salvation — has been effective in many respects, especially for recruitment of new believers. But the failure to respond to the critical issue of the era may lead to a decline.

Factors that affect religions' choice in responding to the ecocrisis are numerous. First, the choice is affected by the religion's bond to the hegemonic power in the international system. Expanding religion is always linked to an expanding power. Religions have been closely associated with the rise and decline of empires and nation-states. World religions — Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, and Buddhism have contributed to the rise of a certain group of people organized as a polity — empires in their case. Under the current wave of globalization, not a religious but a secular system of thought — liberal capitalism — is associated with the hegemony of the United States. Christianity thus plays subsidiary functions for the U.S. hegemony in the age of globalization. However, the expansion of Christianity is closely related to the might of the United States in the international system. Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity is rapidly expanding in countries located in the American sphere of influence. The tension between reactive and adaptive postures found in Christianity reflects the strain in American society at large.

Historic connection thus affects the choice made by religions. Religions occupy the dominant position in the value system of a polity and this make them participate in that polity's rise and decline. During the last two centuries, the United Kingdom and the United States have assumed leading roles in the international system and Protestant Christianity was the major religion of these countries. The idea is that environmental degradation comes from the crimes of the powerful. Religions or denominations which are not part of this historic connection may feel less responsible for the environmental degradation, whereas the standard Protestant theology of nature is considered as a significant barrier to make an effective response to environmental issues (Keller 1997: 355-70). From such a perspective, Catholicism is freed from responsibility because dissociating nature from religion stem from the Protestant rejection of Catholicism (Oliver 1992: 379-404). For this reason, non-Protestant Christian churches tend to be more favorable to the environmental cause. Judaism has explored the possibility of a move toward environmentalism (Tucker 1997: 3-17; Brower 1993: 34-6). Similarly, Mormons have argued that their movement was environment-friendly from the beginning (Alexander 1994: 340-64).

Second, the state-religion relations form another critical dimension. The state and the

¹⁸Therefore, not all progressive Christians would pursue environmental goals because they believe there are other serious issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization (Kohler 1996: 279-85; Lal 1997: 34).

religion have divergent interests. The state counts on the utility of religion in countering the ecocrisis because that contribution may become an asset in enhancing one's international competitiveness. Here the state and religious interests may converge. However, religions primarily seek their own interests and choose strategies that ensure either the status quo or expansion, *independent* from the state interests. Ideally, the state-religion relations over environmental issues will be peaceful and complementary when they share a similar level of interest in environmentalism. When religions are more interested in environmental issues than the state is, they will move ahead of the state. The decline in government involvement is often cited as a cause of the renewed presence of religions in health, agriculture, human development and environmental preservation (Mayotte 1998: 65-9). The reverse may also occur.¹⁹ The state may become too environmentally active for conservative religions. In both cases, religion politicized by environmental issues can affect politics by lobbying and electoral politics. Religion can play a role disproportionate to its size because it is organized.

Third, a major shift in the current international system — the transition from fragmentation to integration — is a factor affecting choice. Different realms of society that were hitherto separated are in the process of being reintegrated. The separation of religion from other realms of society is blamed as a source of the ecocrisis. For instance, it is argued that the separation of science and religion led to the destruction of nature (Hope & Young 1994: 182). If separation was the cause of the ecocrisis, then the reverse — reintegration — can be proposed as a solution. Similarly, it is argued that religion and law can work together to cope with the challenge of population pressure, excess consumption, and environmental degradation and environmental law has already begun to reflect religious influence (Coward 1997: 1169-85). Reactive and adaptive responses thus stem from diverging views on the transformation of the current religion-society relations.

Finally, the West-Rest relations affect the religion-environmentalism nexus. The North-South split in the international system has lost much of its meaning because of the end of the Cold War. The division between the West and the non-West comes to the fore (Huntington 1996: 183-245). Both the West and the Rest can learn from each other but which will arrive at a workable synthesis? The West, which is responsible for the ecocrisis, is paradoxically more favorably positioned. Environmentalism is essentially "western" in its origin just as other offshoots of Western history such as democracy, the market economy, and human rights are Western in origin. In non-Western countries and regions, responding to the environmental challenge involves both importing ideas, practices, and institutions from the West and restructuring its own tradition in a more environment-friendly direction.

In the non-West, responses to the impact of the West have been adaptive or reactive. The evolving religion-environmentalism relations will be influenced by the history of the response. Countries where traditional religions are alive, religion-based environmentalism will emerge centering on that tradition. For instance Buddhism is the major proponent of environmentalism in Thailand.²⁰ Because of the breakdown of Confucianism in East Asia, environmentalism cannot be based on Confucianism.

¹⁹The nature of the leadership and presidential character affects the relationship between religion and environmentalism and some leaders and presidents happen to be more interested in environmental matters than others. For instance, Al Gore is too environmentalist for conservative Christians (Goode & Lehrer 1998: 19-20; Loconte 1993: 47).

²⁰See Darlington 1998.

In the West, religion-society relations in the history of the expansion of the West and of colonialism affect the Christian response to the ecocrisis and environmentalism. The history of the West's success may paradoxically make the readjustment difficult. There are also significant national differences. The religion-environmentalism relation is more conflictual in the United States than in other countries of the West. The religious right of the United States is opposed to the environmentalists over the issue of eco-education and is allied with the Heritage Foundation, and the oil companies (Manilov & Schwarz, 1996: 36). A number of Christian leaders criticize that the Christian organizations work too closely with the secular environmental movement that negates religious values (Frame 1996: 83; Ruben 1994: 19-22). In contrast, religious and environment education are better integrated in the United Kingdom.²¹

5. CONCLUSION

Strategic alliance over the issue of the ecocrisis can be made among Christian churches, among different religions, and between religions and secular environmentalism. Ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue can be the basis of such cooperation. The World Council of Churches espoused the concept of sustainable development in 1974. It issued documents directly addressing climate change in 1993 and 1996.²² Paul Gorman founded the National Religious Partnership for the Environment in 1992. It consists of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish groups and is involved in government lobbying.²³

However, because environmental degradation is not a central concern of religions, alliance of religions with negative implications for the environmental cause can be made. For instance, the alliance of Catholicism and Islam over population issues that stems from their fear of empowering women (Hertsgaard 1993: 21-2) can worsen environmental condition in the areas where these religions are dominant. The alliance between secular and religious environmentalists already exists. The World Wide Fund for Nature organized a conference in 1987 to explore the environmental teaching of various faiths were explored and since then as many as 130,000 united projects have been initiated ("Godliness and greenness" 1996: 108). Religion-environmentalism alliance can also be based on a conservative position: both religious people and environmentalists are opposed to the patenting of genes and genetic alterations (Johnson 1992: 82-3).

Just as politics and religions try to survive and expand, environmentalism will try to enhance their importance. The success of environmentalism and environmental activism will depend on a host of factors. Environmentalism, as an "ideology," has to justify and serve the interests of both the ruler and the ruled. In that sense, environmentalism will be affected by power relationship in the international system and its evolution. The success of environmentalism also depends on the evolution of science-religion relations because it is at the center of the crossroads. Environmentalism is based on scientific analysis of the present and the future. At the same time, it displays some pseudo-Christian or pseudo-religious aspects. It is to some extent millenarian and apocalyptic because it preaches

²¹See Croall 1994.

²²See Hallman 1997.

²³See Johnson 1997: 11; Gallegos 1997: 14; "Environment and the poor" 1997: 214; "Churches care for the earth" 1993: 968-9.

the end or a need for fundamental change. Theories from social science tend to be mere *ex post facto* explanation of history. However, religions have deeper historical and emotional roots and thus have revolutionary potentials for the environmental cause.

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