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[We publish here the second and last part of the essay by Dr. Alexander F. Skutch, which was the subject of discussion at the Indian Institute of Culture, Basavangudi, Bangalore, on December 4th, 1952. In this essay, part of a book which the Costa Rican naturalist has in preparation, he brings out the need of a religious—better, perhaps, a spiritual or an idealistic—approach to the problems of man's attitude and conduct towards the lower kingdoms.—ED.]

RELIGION AND CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

II

Many explanations have been advanced for the cult of totemism so wide spread among primitive races, and anthropologists have been unable to reach general agreement as to its significance. It is probable that part of this perplexity and confusion arises from the fact that the totem acquired different meanings, and was associated with diverse rites, among different peoples. It is clear, however, that in many instances the totem was the animal or plant upon which the clan chiefly depended for food, and that the ceremonies associated with this totem were for the purpose of assuring its continued abundance.

Professor Murphy¹ has traced a most curious inversion in the relation of the clan to its totem animal. In the most primitive type of totemism, the totem represents the creature which is chiefly used for food. Although eaten freely, its death and the meal which follows are attended by certain ceremonies, designed to propitiate its spirit and to ensure the propagation of its kind; as in the rites which accompany the feasts of bear flesh among the Ainu of Japan. Such a ritual gradually increases the aura of sacredness surrounding the food animal. There also arise feelings of brotherhood toward the animal upon which the tribe subsist; eater and eaten become in a sense one in flesh and blood.

The notion that a sacred bond exists between the victim of the sacrificial

meal and those who partake of its flesh is wide spread among mankind and is echoed in the symbolism of the Eucharist. Thus there comes a time when the animal which once formed the habitual diet of a clan can be eaten only on certain solemn occasions attended by elaborate ritual; as in the yearly meal of buffalo flesh among the Todas of southern India, who otherwise abstain from eating this animal so important in their pastoral economy. Finally, the animal becomes too sacred ever to be eaten, like the cow among the Hindus.

It is obvious that when the animal which was once the chief support of life becomes too sacred to be eaten, the people among whom this occurs must have discovered alternative means of subsistence; otherwise they would starve. The chief factor operative in this change of attitude toward animal life was the domestication of plants and the development of an adequate agriculture. It was earlier mentioned that primitive man often felt uneasy about taking life, especially that of certain animals and of trees, yet was constrained by life's cruel predicament to kill in order to remain alive; and that this conflict of motives led in many instances to behaviour which has all the marks of an unsatisfactory compromise.

With the development of agriculture the necessity for such compromise diminished or ceased. Man could at

least refrain from taking the life of inoffensive animals, yet continue to live. This occurred in some of the most ancient civilizations, especially in the "Fertile Crescent" stretching from the Mediterranean to China, with momentous consequences for the cause of conservation.

As usual when two conflicting motives which had been held together by force of circumstances are made independent of each other by altered conditions, it was uncertain which would become dominant to the virtual exclusion of the other. It was possible for the development of agriculture to have quite different consequences. When men no longer depended upon wild animals as their primary support, they were free to adopt a more casual attitude toward them. The religious restraints upon their slaughter, the rites intended to assure their multiplication and continued abundance, died away. Religion, which in its earlier stages was never indifferent to the primary vital needs of mankind, now had its eyes turned in other directions—to fertility cults to ensure the vernal awakening of the vegetation and the continued productivity of the grain-fields, and finally to the salvation of man's immortal soul.

With his waxing economic competence, his greater power, his growing luxury in raiment, house and food, with his increasing distance from wild Nature, with the soaring range and widening scope of his intellect, man began to feel far superior to other forms of life with which he had earlier felt almost on a footing of equality. There grew up, among Hellenic philosophers no less than among Hebrew prophets, a teleologic view of the world which held that all other forms of life had been expressly created for the service of mankind. Indeed, Aristotle went beyond this and proclaimed that "inferior" races of man had been created to serve their betters.

Since Greek philosophy and Hebrew theology have dominated all subsequent thought in the Western world,

this is the attitude which has remained with us through all our changes in cosmic outlook and coloured all our views. With religion finally devoting itself almost exclusively to man's welfare in another world, with philosophy all but submerged in problems of epistemology or the validity of knowledge, the economic motive has controlled man's relations with other forms of life with little restraint from either.

It often happens that too intensive cultivation of a single motive defeats its own purpose. It is at last becoming apparent to thoughtful men that in giving free rein to the economic motive in our relations with the natural world, with none of the restraints and controls that religion once imposed, we have come within an ace of killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Of course, a far-sighted application of the economic motive in dealing with Nature might have had different results; but we are rarely far-seeing when we are greedy.

Men have as a rule cultivated longer thoughts under the influence of religious feeling than under that of acquisitive instincts. Paradoxically, those peoples who, after they became proficient in agriculture, allowed stronger weight to the religious motive in their dealings with other forms of life, chose also the way which was soundest from the point of view of a far-seeing economy. Although with different incentives, they advanced the cause of conservation centuries before the West gave much thought to this pressing need.

Of all the religions which have survived into modern times, Jainism and Buddhism have most consistently taught the sacredness of all living things. Some sects of Hinduism are almost equally insistent upon the sanctity of all forms of life. Thus the duties enjoined in the ancient Hindu *Brahmanas* include: (1) those to the gods, (2) those to seers, (3) those to the ancestors, (4) those to men, and (5) those to the lower creation. No devout man could touch his daily meal

¹ JOHN MURPHY, *The Origins and History of Religions* (1949).

without offering parts of it to gods, fathers, men and animals, and saying his daily prayers.²

The great prophets of the Jains and the Buddhists, Mahavira and Gautama, were contemporaries in northern India in the sixth century before Christ. So stringent are the Jain laws against taking the life of even the least creature that it is scarcely possible for a devout Jain to practise agriculture, which inevitably involves the destruction of many living things in plowing, in harvesting and in protecting the growing crops from weeds and predatory creatures of many sorts. Jains, therefore, are perforce professional men, merchants and bankers. It is difficult to conceive of a whole nation of Jains, devoid of agriculture; and apparently this is one of the reasons why Jainism has remained a small sect confined to the land of its birth.³

Less extreme than Jainism in its views upon animal life, Buddhism has exercised far wider influence upon men's thoughts and conduct. The Buddhist faith had only a small following until, about 261 B.C., it was embraced by Asoka. With Asoka's conversion Buddhism became the court religion of a great empire, although other faiths were not only tolerated but even supported by the Emperor.

One of the first effects of the Buddhist teaching was to cause Asoka to put a total stop to the wars of conquest which during three generations had given the Mauryas dominion over a vast territory extending from southern India to the Hindu Kush mountains. This was the immense field in which Asoka strove to make effective some of the more concrete consequences of the Buddhist doctrines.

Asoka's decrees were carved in stone on magnificent pillars set up in the more central districts of his domains, or, in more remote regions, cut into

great boulders and the exposed faces of outcropping rocks. The imperial order known to antiquarians as Pillar Edict V, is, for the student of the history of the conservation of natural resources, a document of exceptional interest. It contains one of the most comprehensive lists of protected animals ever issued by any government, ancient or modern. While the United States and other modern countries have mentioned by name a larger number of bird species that are to be exempt from slaughter, the range of animals given such protection is far more restricted.

Asoka prohibited the killing of parrots, starlings, geese, doves and other birds; of bats, tortoises, river skates, boneless fish and queen ants; of porcupines, tree-squirrels, *barasingha* stags, rhinoceros and all four-footed animals which are neither eaten nor otherwise utilized. For the kinds of fish whose capture and eating were permitted, closed seasons were established; on certain specified days fish could be neither caught nor sold. And on these same days the destruction of animals of any kind in elephant forests and fish ponds was strictly prohibited.

Forests were not to be set on fire either wantonly or for the destruction of life; and the chaff from the threshing-floors could not be burned because of the small living creatures which lurked in it. Ewes, sows and female goats were exempted from slaughter so long as they were with young or in milk, as well as their offspring up to six months of age.⁴ Likewise restrictions were set upon the castration and branding of domestic animals.

The purpose of Asoka's comprehensive laws was not, as with modern legislation of a similar nature, to preserve forests as sources of lumber and protectors of watersheds, or to ensure an abundance of game to be hunted at appropriate seasons.

The practical results of many of the measures contained in Asoka's edicts would be difficult to distinguish from those of modern conservation laws whose motivation is economic. We lack information as to the strictness of their enforcement; but from all we know of Asoka's conscientious personal attention to the details of government and the efficiency of his administration, we may infer that it compared favourably with the best present-day enforcement of similar measures.

After the passing of the able Maurya dynasty, Buddhism declined and at length died away in the country where it had been born. In the Middle Ages India was overrun by Moslem invaders whose attitude toward Nature was quite different from that of Hinduism and its derivative religions. It is of interest, however, to observe the influence of religious belief on the conservation policies of the Mogul Emperor Akbar, the greatest of the Mohammedan rulers of India. Intensely interested in religious and philosophical questions, this remarkable man, unable to read or write, invited to his court a succession of learned doctors of the most diverse faiths, who might expound their views to him. According to V. A. Smith,⁵ the Emperor was for a period greatly influenced by the doctrines of the Jain teacher Hiravijaya, who from 1582 to 1584 resided at the imperial court, and is credited by his co-religionists with having converted the great Mogul to the faith of Mahavira. Although Akbar was in his youth (as also at a later period) an enthusiastic devotee of the chase, while under Jain influence he renounced his much-loved hunting and restricted his practice of fishing. He ordered the release of prisoners and caged birds, and later prohibited the slaughter of animals during periods amounting collectively to half of the year. He himself abstained almost wholly from eating flesh. The edicts which, under the influence of Jainism, Akbar issued for the protection of animal life resemble in many respects

those which Asoka, almost 2,000 years earlier, had decreed.

The effect over a long period of years of a people's attitude toward Nature depends upon many factors, important among which are the consistency in time and space with which the dominant concepts are honoured; the understanding of natural cycles or of ecology, by which the desire to protect the natural world is supported; and, above all, the pressure which the human population exerts upon the natural environment that surrounds and sustains it.

India was too long dominated by aliens whose religions took a very different attitude toward living beings, was too long torn by internal dissensions, to allow us to form a picture of how the concepts of Hinduism, if consistently applied, might have affected the conservation of her natural resources. Certainly she has not cherished her forests, her waters and the multitudinous life which they support as well as our most advanced notions on conservation would have counselled. But we may ask ourselves what the present picture might have been had this ancient, densely populated country adopted a millennium ago the policy of unrestricted exploitation of nature which has been characteristic of the West.

The most illuminating report upon man's relations with Nature in modern India which has come to my attention is John Lockwood Kipling's *Beast and Man in India*, published toward the end of the last century. It reveals among the people an attitude highly favourable to the survival of free animals of all sorts, along with amazing tolerance of their depredations upon grain fields, orchards, and even merchandise in shops. At the same time, there was among the lower classes a lamentable lack of kindness and consideration for domestic animals.

At this point it might be well to remind ourselves that the conservation

² S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 131. (1923).

³ On Jain practices, see E. PAULINE QUIGLY, "The Preservation of Animal Life in India." *THE ARYAN PATH*, Vol. 22, pp. 531-536. December 1951.

⁴ VINCENT A. SMITH, *Asoka*, pp. 87-8. (2nd edition. 1909)

⁵ *Akbar, the Great Mogul*, pp. 166-168. (2nd edition. 1919)

of natural resources and kindness to animals are distinct although not unrelated subjects. The first regards the preservation of species, the second the happiness of individuals. Concern for the multiplication of a species is not incompatible with the persecution of individuals of this species; indeed, men often desire that animals should propagate so that they may persecute and destroy them.

Certain primitive rites which reveal praiseworthy awareness of the necessity of conserving the kinds of animals which support the tribal economy involve shockingly cruel treatment of representatives of these species. And much of the modern clamour for conservation is inspired by no higher motive than the desire to have a liberal supply of victims for blood sports. The practice of conservation reveals in primitive tribes a degree of foresight often lacking in more advanced cultures; but kindness to other beings, whether of our own kind or of distinct species, springs from imaginative sympathy and other noble qualities of spirit which usually are poorly developed in barbarous races.

In outlying Burma, Buddhism fared better than in India. The interior of the country remained relatively free of European influences until the British invasion of Upper Burma in the 1880's. H. Fielding Hall, an Englishman who resided in the country during the early days of the British occupation and wrote a delightful book⁶ on his observations, attested the tenderness and respect which the Burmese felt for all classes of living things, their reluctance to destroy the fauna or the great trees which they believed to be the abodes of tutelary spirits. Their attitude was in part determined by old animistic beliefs far older than Buddhism but which had been found not incompatible with adherence to Buddhist doctrines.

In appraising this point of view, we may ask ourselves whether animism diverges farther in one direction from the elusive truth than our own prevalent materialism does in the other. But, however we may assess the beliefs which lead men to treat with some degree of sympathy and restraint the living world about them, the practical results are those which scientists of late have been loudly proclaiming to be essential to our continued survival.

From another Buddhist country, Tibet, we have the evidence of a recent visitor, an ornithologist,⁷ who wrote:—

Shooting in Lhasa is forbidden and so it was quite impossible to make a collection.... One of the most delightful attributes of the birds of Lhasa is their amazing tameness. Even migrants, such as the various species of duck, seem to realize that they are inviolate in the neighbourhood of the Holy City. Brahminy Duck breed regularly in holes in the basement of the Dalai Lama's palace, and on a winter's morning I have seen flocks of Barheaded Geese waddle across the road within a dozen yards of my pony, and barely condescend to notice me.

When we recall the annual clamour in North America by those who wish to amuse themselves by shooting more and more of the diminishing wild fowl which conservation agencies are vainly striving to maintain in adequate numbers, it is refreshing to know that there are, or have been until quite recently, parts of the world where free creatures are preserved by the inner feeling of the people rather than by wardens appointed by law to restrain hordes of men impatient to kill.

The wanton, reckless slaughter which in North America led to the irreparable destruction of whole species of living beings once abundant and to the reduction of others almost to the point of extinction resulted from a lack of religious feeling, from the failure of the dominant Western faiths to give that comprehensive guidance along life's perplexing path which it has been

from its inception the mission of religion to provide. It is within the province of science to show us the best way of conserving the natural world, as likewise the most effective means of destroying it to the last vestige; but which of these two is the better choice in terms of ultimate values it is incapable of deciding for us, because these values elude its grasp.

The competence of science is avowedly limited to the phenomenal world, yet beyond this there is a transcendent realm into which our being extends, and which we must take into account in ordering our lives. Religion and philosophy, although they attain to no empirical knowledge of this realm, yet strive to infer its character from indications which science cannot evaluate. Whereas science offers us concrete information within a sphere that is admittedly incomplete, religion attempts to orient our lives with relation to a vaster whole of which its knowledge can at best be vague. Yet we do better when we strive to guide our lives with reference to this whole, however imperfectly we understand it, than when we dogmatically affirm the non-existence of that which physical vision fails to reveal to us.

Throughout by far the greater part of mankind's history, religion has endeavoured to bring harmony, unity and purpose into human life within the framework of the best factual information and the most respected metaphysical doctrines available to it at the time and place. This has been true not only of tribal animistic faiths but of great world religions, including Christianity in western Europe at least until the end of the Mediaeval period. Perhaps none of the highly systematized religions has been able to do equal justice to all the trends implicit in the more diffuse and plastic animisms and polytheisms which preceded them.

Those religions which look to the Old Testament as their point of origin have attempted the difficult task of preserving a more or less strict monotheism, although animism and polytheism are

apparently more spontaneous forms of human thought, and men tend to revert to them whenever dogma, education and discipline are relaxed. Perhaps because of this central preoccupation with a jealous personal Deity, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism have been less sensitive to man's relationship to the living world around him than that other great family of religions whose roots go back to the Vedas and the Upanishads. Yet, until the Reformation, the Catholic Church did essay to provide guidance for men not only on the straight and narrow path to heaven, but also in all those economic and civil dealings which engaged them along the way. The guidance was not always perfect, because the men who gave it were not always as wise and as good as they might have been; yet it offered a steadying hand in a barbarous age, and led Europe a long march along the road to civilization.

With the great expansion in men's outlook at the Renaissance, the Church was faced with a difficult alternative. Human knowledge was fast becoming too vast and too complex to be mastered by one mind; and the ecclesiastic could not, like his precursor, the tribal magician or *shaman*, know as much as all those who looked to him for counsel—and possibly a little more. The Church had either to relinquish its claim to complete and infallible knowledge, or to relax its effort to provide comprehensive guidance for mankind along the difficult road of life.

If organized Christianity had been more responsive to men's changing concepts of the nature and history of the physical world, more ready to admit the superior competence of science in interpreting this world and to enlist scientific skill in dealing with particular problems within its total doctrinal frame, it might have continued to give comprehensive direction to the lives of its adherents. But it chose what has proved for Western civilization the worse course. Perhaps because it was too deeply committed to

⁶ *The Soul of a People*. (1898)

⁷ F. LUDLOW, "The Birds of Lhasa." (*Ibis*, Vol. 92, pp. 34-36, 1950.) For additional recent testimony on the respect for animal life in a Buddhist country (Indo-China) see NORMAN LEWIS, *A Dragon Apparent, passim*, but especially Chapter XVII, "Laos."

its cosmologic dogmas to abandon or alter them, it stuck stubbornly to ancient views which had become untenable in the light of expanding knowledge, and missed its opportunity to grow so that it might infuse with the softening and ennobling breath of religion all the increasing complexities of modern life.

Professor Tawney⁸ has shown in detail how, in the sphere of business and economics, Christianity in its several branches has since the Reformation relaxed its efforts to place restraints upon that greed which both Eastern and Western religions have declared to be one of the deadly sins and to mitigate man's treatment of his fellow men.

In another great human enterprise

which is becoming increasingly important, man's attempt to cultivate reciprocally favourable relations with the natural environment that sustains him, Western religions appear to be failing to give that support and guidance which, from a consideration of the whole history of religion, we might expect of them. Neither science, which addresses itself to the intellect without attempting to enlist the emotions, nor civil law, which compels where it cannot persuade, can ever become satisfactory substitutes for religion, which at its highest employs neither threats nor coercion to influence conduct, but offers to men the compelling ideal of a life regulated in all its details by the unifying force of a central, dominant aspiration.

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⁸ R. H. TAWNEY, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. (1926)