
Book Review

Md. Abu Sayem, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (New York: Routledge Publishers, 2023), 190 pp., \$144 (hbk), ISBN: 9781032249476.

As an extension of Md. Abu Sayem's doctoral dissertation, his book contributes to the intersection of religious ethics and ecological concerns through the perspectives of two faith traditions—Christianity and Islam. Highlighting current and unprecedented ecological degradations, Abu Sayem explores the works of John Boswell Cobb (a process Christian theologian) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (a Muslim philosopher and Islamic scholar) as standard-setters of their respective religious positionalities. This book is credited as the first comparative study between Cobb and Nasr and is most specifically a contribution to scholarship at the intersection of Religious, Ecological, and Environmental Studies. The most immediate readership of the work would be those interested in interfaith discourse on environmental and religious issues. It is essential to note that the book could have a broader readership beyond these areas by inspiring future research in Environmental Humanities, Religious, Ecological, and Environmental Studies.

Abu Sayem's primary claim is that religion is critical to providing a moral and ethical relationship between humans and nature. His aim centers on how Cobb and Nasr connect their faith traditions to discuss ecological issues and propose solutions. Abu Sayem offers an analysis, illumination, and response to the current ecological crisis and the God-human-nature relationship with each scholar. Proceeding with self-imposed objectives, methodologies, and approaches throughout the book, Abu Sayem analytically and critically engages with the eco-theological views of Cobb and the Islamic eco-religious position of Nasr (p. 6). A spirit of discernment merges with literary dialogical and reciprocal-illumination approaches in his comparative method to avoid shallow, sentimental comparison and equations and 'to locate Cobb and Nasr in their due places' (p. 4). An essential section is his clarification and review of frequently used concepts such as nature, natural environment, ecology, the environment, eco-theology, and eco-religion. With these definitions, he provides the needed background for the reader and supports his exploration.

The book comprises six chapters. Chapter One, the Introduction, emphasizes the urgency of an immediate and long-term solution and the potential impact on theological, religious, and faith communities. Chapter Two summarizes environmental issues and their connection to religious and spiritual traditions and moral guidelines, focusing on Christianity and Islam to unite communities around the shared problem of ecological decay (p. 20). Frequently cited as one of the most influential Christian theologians of the twentieth century, Abu Sayem delves into an exploration of Cobb's

methodology, theories, and solutions in Chapter Three. Cobb utilizes process thought and ecological science, and his approach adopts practical steps for changing human behavior (p. 36). Chapter Four undertakes a similar exploration of Nasr's eco-philosophical and eco-spiritual thought. Nasr utilizes a traditional approach based on sacred features of nature and the sanctity of life and takes a spiritual view of nature, aiming to revitalize our human inner feelings for the natural world (p. 70).

Abu Sayem's comparative analysis is in Chapter Five. He dissects the similarities and differences between their Islamic and Christian approaches to environmental issues and their positions on human stewardship/dominion over creation. In Chapter Five, he utilizes Cobb and Nasr's perspectives in dialogue to clarify their eco-religious understandings and to showcase the promising potential for Muslims and Christians to enrich their eco-religious perspectives through mutual learning (p. 129). Chapter Six is the concluding chapter of the book and summarizes the findings by highlighting the completed research objectives and making a few conclusions. By comparing the Christian (Cobb) and Islamic (Nasr) views of the environment, Chapter Six suggests that they can illuminate each other (p. 137). This concluding chapter also restates why this research is unique in comparing both scholars with one another in dialogical mode and how it may inspire and pave the way for future studies.

According to Abu Sayem's analysis, a holistic approach to environmental issues is critical in Cobb's and Nasr's perspectives. While Cobb's solution offers immediate returns, Nasr's solutions are long-term based. However, both scholars should have included social justice issues and how this is intertwined with ecological justice. This omission is significant, as ecological disparity is a global phenomenon, and marginalized populations, particularly women and children, suffer disproportionately. As an integrative and holistic approach to the problem and solution, this fact must be considered.

Abu Sayem's critical illumination is his methodological stance, attention to clarifying definitions, and emphasis on the need to improve human-nature relationship based on religious understanding of the environment, which implies that our only hope is to repair a broken God-human-nature paradigm. Abu Sayem believes more research is necessary from the perspectives of many religious and spiritual traditions, as his study complements such efforts (p. 6). He challenged vital assessments by identifying the limitations of his study. Relational restorations and interpretations of religious understandings of human stewardship/dominion and the sacredness of nature are needed. Therefore, ecological restoration and sustainability must be grounded in maintaining due relationships in and with the environment, requiring an improved onto-epistemological stance that rethinks and deconstructs anthropocentric and androcentric mentalities in religious worldviews and human societies.

Presuming that problematic worldviews of nature due to human and patriarchal arrogance are behind our current ecological crisis. In that case, to address the limitations of this study, future researchers must challenge the standard-setters of current and dominant perspectives. As noted by Abu Sayem, a more insightful study

could include consulting with various Muslim and Christian scholars from various backgrounds (p. 8). Cobb and Nasr's positions supported a hierarchy of creation with humanity at the top of creation. Religions must repair three critical relationships: God to humans, human to human, and human to creation in both short and long-term ways and grounded by egalitarian values of Divine justice. In addition, if the long-term solution does not consider why immediate solutions are necessary, then we can be sure that those problematic attitudes and behaviors will resurface. We must learn that our history of arriving at the crisis carries a lesson for restructuring and improving our way of being in the world.

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