

SPIRITUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NETHERLANDS

A comparison of holistic spirituality
and Christian dualism

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1. Introduction

Just like the two other western monotheistic religious traditions, Judaism and Islam, Christian dualism is informed by a distinction between man's world and God's world. The former is understood as the creation of a personal God who as such cannot be part of His own creation and hence must be transcendent, i.e., reside in a distinct world of His own. This implies an understanding of nature as essentially disenchanted and void of spiritual meaning. In oriental religious traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism such a dualism does not exist. The assumption is that there is just one world, which is permeated by the sacred, here conceived as an all-pervasive spirit, life force, or energy. With the notion of a personal God-creator being absent, the sacred is here not conceived as transcendent, but as immanent, entailing an understanding of nature as permeated by and inextricably intertwined with the sacred (Weber, 1963 [1922]).

Such an essentially "eastern" religious worldview also lies at the basis of the holistic spirituality that has become increasingly widespread in many western countries since the 1960s (Campbell, 2008; Houtman and Aupers, 2007; Houtman and Mascini, 2002). Hardly surprisingly, then, the rise and spread of this type of holistic spirituality has often been associated with the

emergence of an understanding of nature and the environment that differs profoundly from the traditional Christian outlook. Whereas the latter has been accused of being responsible for environmental exploitation and pollution (e.g., Passmore, 1980; White, 1967), the former has been portrayed as much friendlier vis-à-vis nature and the environment (e.g., Bloch, 1998; Campbell, 2008; Taylor, 2010).

Systematic empirical studies of how and why contemporary adherents of holistic spirituality differ from these of Christian dualism in terms of environmental consciousness have not yet been done, however. Moreover, the available studies about whether and why Christian dualism detracts from environmental consciousness have produced puzzling findings that call for a theoretical reframing of the research problem at hand. In what follows, we therefore analyze survey data collected in the Netherlands to study whether, how and why Christian dualism and holistic spirituality affect environmental consciousness differently. Our aim is hence not merely to describe differences between holistic spirituality and Christian dualism in terms of environmental consciousness, but also to explain these differences in terms of underlying understandings of nature.

2. Nature's religiously contested nature

2.1 *The ambivalent nature of Christian dualism*

Christian dualism is quite often conceived to have played a major role in legitimating large-scale environmental exploitation and the emergence of the modern western science-based world. Classical accounts in this respect are American historian Lynn White, Jr's (1967) "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis" and Australian philosopher John Passmore's (1980) "Man's responsibility for nature." According to these authors, Christianity's disenchanting understanding of nature was accompanied by a worldview in which man, as God had created him in His image, occupied the center of the universe. Mankind hence gained its position as the rightful master over nature. This anthropocentrism can most clearly be found in Genesis verse 1:28, which reads: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moved upon the earth". It is this incitement, White (1967: 1205) maintains, that makes Christianity "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen (. . .), [It] not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."

This "dominion dualism" – i.e., the conception of nature as created by God for no other purpose than serving mankind – is assumed by White and Passmore to have made Christian dualists unconscious of their environmental

surroundings. Those who embrace it are as such discouraged to be worried about environmental pollution and deterioration (cf. Hand and Van Liere, 1984). This assumption is commonly known as the “dominion thesis”. It remains widely contested. This is due to the fact that survey research has indicated that the negative relationship between Christianity and environmental consciousness, which the dominion thesis implies, simply does not exist (Schutz, Zelezny and Dalrymple, 2000). In fact, only some studies demonstrate (typically weak) negative relationships (e.g., Eckberg and Blocker, 1989, 1996; Guth et al., 1995; Shaiko, 1987), others report no relationship at all (e.g., Hand and Van Liere, 1984; Kanagy and Nelsen, 1995; Wolkomir et al., 1997; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994), yet others report positive ones (e.g., Dekker, Ester and Nas, 1997).

This puzzling mixture of results permits the inference that Christian dualism does not at all detract from environmental consciousness. Instead it indicates that there are on average just as many Christian dualists who are conscious of the environment as there are those who are unconscious of the environment. Hardly surprisingly then, the second half of the twentieth century has reported all sorts of signs that suggest a marked “greening” of Christian dualism (Nash, 1989). The National Council of Churches, for instance, has since the 1970s promoted a religious ecological agenda with policies specifically aimed at environmental protection (Fouler, 1995). And a similar trend toward more environmental consciousness can be witnessed in the Roman Catholic Church, especially since Pope John Paul II (Campbell, 2008).

This rise of Christian environmental consciousness is typically taken to have resulted from a reinterpretation of Christianity’s understanding of the relationship between man and nature from “dominion” to “stewardship”. The latter entails a strikingly different conception of dualism: that it urges humankind to care for nature as part of God’s creation rather than to use and exploit it for its own benefit (Attfield, 2003; Beyer, 1994; Kearns, 1996, 1997; Nash, 1989). The National Council of Churches (2011) thus legitimates its eco-justice programme by stating that: “Humans are tenants who hold the land in trust from God and in partnership with all creatures. Through God, the land nourishes all life and provides us with what we need to survive. As part of our call to be stewards of creation, we have a responsibility to God to care for the land, ensuring that it serves the good of all Creation, and protecting it for future generations and for all life.”

“Stewardship dualism” is not new to Christian theology, to be sure (consider, for instance, St Francis of Assisi) (Attfield, 2003; Passmore, 1980). It is however likely that it quite recently has gained in importance: along with the increase in ecological consciousness since the 1960s. If such is actually the case, it is to be expected that Christian dualists nowadays adhere to dominion as well as stewardship, with the former detracting from environmental consciousness and the latter adding to it. The fact that studies into

the validity of the dominion thesis have yielded hardly any relationship between Christian religiosity and environmental consciousness already alludes to the possibility that dominion and stewardship are equally shared by Christian dualists.

Previous studies have neglected this ambivalent relationship between Christian dualism and environmental consciousness. They have not only failed to include dominion as the variable assumed to mediate between the former and the latter, but have also failed to actually include stewardship, which allegedly adds to environmental consciousness rather than detracting from it. As a result, the inference made by many authors that the dominion thesis is basically untenable (e.g., Dekker, Ester and Nas, 1997; Greeley, 1993; Kanagy and Nelsen, 1995; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994) is at this point in time just as invalidated as the dominion thesis itself. To actually test the dominion thesis, then, we need to test it simultaneously with the stewardship thesis in a single model, which should hence take both dominion and stewardship into account as the variables that allegedly mediate between Christian dualism and ecological consciousness. We then expect to find that Christian dualists adhere to dominion as well as stewardship, with the former detracting from environmental consciousness and the latter adding to it. If this is what we find, the dominion thesis is valid after all. According to this scenario, the validity of the thesis has been obscured by the failure in previous studies to take into account that the same applies to the stewardship thesis, which works in the reverse direction.

2.2 The enchanted nature of nature in holistic spirituality

Although dominion and stewardship are typically understood to influence environmental consciousness in opposite directions, it is nonetheless vital to remember that they are both dualistic conceptions of nature. That is, they both assume that the sacred does not reside in nature, but in a distinct divine realm that transcends nature and the rest of the world inhabited by humans. From this perspective, the nature of nature remains unchanged no matter whether mankind considers itself the rightful master over nature or its rightful caretaker. Stewardship is hence just as anthropocentric as dominion in its understanding of nature. As Attfield (1983: 371) rightly notes: “[With stewardship] the Biblical denial that nature is sacred is endorsed, belief in the rights of animals is rejected, the value of science and technology is reaffirmed, and the preservation of human civilization is presented as morally central.” This understanding of nature as an essentially disenchanting domain subject to human volition is distinctive of the monotheistic “western” religious model.

The monistic “eastern” religious model is built on yet another understanding of nature, one which is quite similar to that of the holistic types of “New Age” spirituality that from the 1960s onwards have spread rapidly

throughout most Western countries (Campbell, 2008; Hanegraaff, 1996, 2002; Houtman and Aupers, 2007; Houtman and Mascini, 2002). As indicated above, holistic spirituality deviates from Christian dualism in that it does not assume a distinction between nature and the sacred. There is hence no transcendent God who inhabits a world of his own. The sacred is considered immanent in the cosmos and by implication in the whole of earthly matter including nature. This means that the anthropocentric distinction between man and nature is also abandoned. Both are permeated by the sacred, conceived here as an immanent power, life force or energy that connects “everything”. Moreover, this means that the Cartesian distinction between body and mind is also rejected: holistic spirituality understands the deeper emotional layers of the self as imbued with this universal life force, too. Because holistic spirituality considers the sacred as lying “within” rather than “without” (Heelas et al., 2005; Heelas and Houtman, 2009; Houtman, Aupers and Heelas, 2009) it conceives of intuitions, emotions and bodily experiences as messages from within that need to be taken seriously, getting in touch with what lies within being seen as connecting to “everything” – other humans, nature, and the cosmos as a whole.

Because of the notion that a divine and unifying life force permeates the universe, nature becomes sacrosanct in the holistic spiritual worldview. Campbell (2008: 74) explains this as follows: “To accept that an indefinable absolute divine force rather than a personal, transcendent deity is the governing power in the universe is to see the whole of creation in a new light. For it is to see mankind, nature, and indeed the cosmos as a whole, as united through their shared participation in this divine force. Naturally this leads to a new view of nature and of mankind’s relationship to the natural world, with the ‘natural’ necessarily acquiring some of the attributes of the sacred.”

Such an “eco-spiritual” conception of nature – i.e. the understanding that nature is an intrinsically sacred entity – is considered one of the driving forces behind increasing environmental consciousness in the West (Campbell, 2008). This is because it inspires a wide array of contemporary environmental movements and organizations (Taylor, 2010). The holistic types of spirituality that inform this understanding of nature are hence also considered to engender environmental consciousness. This way, spiritual holists would be encouraged to be worried about environmental problems, particularly those that are man-made.

Contrary to Christian dualism, which depending on whether it builds on stewardship or dominion can allegedly both add to or detract from ecological consciousness, holistic spirituality is understood only to be an impulsion to the latter. If this is actually the case, it is to be expected that spiritual holists on the whole are more conscious of the environment than Christian dualists are. Furthermore, this consciousness is allegedly sparked

by an enchanted understanding of nature that as such deviates markedly from stewardship. Given that holistic spirituality and Christian dualism are based on contrasting conceptions of the sacred – an immanent spirit or life force and a transcendent personal God, respectively – it is not likely that, even today, Christians embrace an eco-spiritual conception of nature nor that spiritual holists embrace a stewardship conception of nature. We therefore expect that to the extent that Christian dualism contributes to environmental consciousness nowadays, this will be sparked by stewardship considerations; while holistic spirituality will add to ecological consciousness as a result of eco-spiritual considerations.

3. Hypotheses

The first hypothesis to be tested in this study addresses the notion that Christian dualism and holistic spirituality affect environmental consciousness differently. As explained above, holistic spirituality is often held to contribute considerably to ecological consciousness, while Christian dualism is in at least some measure held to detract from it. If this is actually the case, we would expect to find that on the whole spiritual holists – i.e. those who believe in an all-pervasive spirit or life-force – are more conscious of the environment than Christian dualists – i.e. than those who believe in a personal God-creator (*hypothesis 1*).

This inference is largely based on the assumption that Christian dualism has an ambiguous influence on environmental consciousness, meaning that it can both discourage and inspire consciousness about the environment depending on whether it builds on dominion or stewardship. If such is actually the case, we should find that Christian dualists adhere to dominion as well as stewardship, with the former detracting from environmental consciousness and the latter adding to it (*hypothesis 2*). If the dominion and stewardship theses are both confirmed, the direct relationship between Christian dualism and environmental consciousness may well approach zero, but this relationship has no implications for either of both theses. Rather it means that the negative effect of dominion and the positive effect of stewardship on ecological consciousness cancel each other out.

Unlike Christian dualism, which allegedly can go both ways when it comes to inspiring consciousness about the environment, holistic spirituality is commonly considered only to add to people's concern with nature's well-being. Furthermore, whereas the environmental consciousness that allegedly exists among Christian dualists is considered to be sparked by stewardship, adherents of holistic spirituality supposedly derive their environmental consciousness from a belief in the intrinsic sacredness of nature. If such is actually the case, we should hence find that adherents of holistic spirituality adopt an eco-spiritual holistic conception of nature, which adds to their environmental consciousness (*hypothesis 3*).

4. Data and measurement

4.1 Data

The hypotheses proposed in this study are tested by means of data collected for the Netherlands. In this country the rapid decline of the Christian churches from the 1960s and 1970s onwards (Barker, Halman and Vloet, 1993; Halman, Lijkx and van Zundert, 2005) has resulted in a diverse and pluralistic religious landscape, with sizable numbers of dualistic Christians, adherents of holistic spirituality, as well as non-religious persons. This makes the Netherlands a suitable country for testing our hypotheses. The data for this study have been collected by means of a survey conducted in the Netherlands as part of the research project “Worldviews, technology and the environment”. This survey was conducted by CentERdata (University of Tilburg) in the fall of 2008. CentERdata is an institute for data collection and research, specialized in online survey research. For this purpose it maintains a panel of respondents that is representative of the Dutch population aged 16 years and older, and its representativeness is carefully preserved. Our online questionnaire has been presented to 2,423 respondents, if necessary up to three times in order to improve the response rate. This has yielded a response rate of 87.5 percent, which comes down to a total of 2,121 respondents. The sample is representative for the Dutch population aged 16 years or older.

4.2 Measurement

Environmental consciousness has been measured by means of a scale derived from Oreg and Katz-Gerro (2006) that measures perceived environmental threats. The scale consists of five Likert-type items about specific environmental problems. Respondents were asked whether they were concerned (“not at all concerned” through “very concerned”) about any of the following environmental threats:

- Env1: Air pollution by industry.
- Env2: River and lake pollution.
- Env3: Air pollution by cars.
- Env4: Pesticides and chemicals in farming.
- Env5: The rise in the world’s temperature (global warming).

A principal component analysis yields one factor with an eigenvalue of 2.93, explaining 59 percent of the total variance, which proves to constitute a reliable scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$). Scale scores for environmental consciousness were given to all respondents who had a valid score on at least four of the five items.

Dominion has been measured by means of five Likert-type items pertaining to a mastery over nature orientation, rated by respondents in terms of agreement

or disagreement (“disagree strongly” through “agree strongly”). The items we have used have often been used in other studies that incorporate a mastery over nature attitude (e.g., Hand and Van Liere, 1984; Shaiko, 1987; Wolkomir et al., 1997; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994), and are listed below:

- Dom1: Plants and animals exist primarily to be used by humans.
- Dom2: Mankind was created to rule over nature.
- Dom3: Humans are allowed to use nature to their own advantage.
- Dom4: It's not bad to adjust the natural environment to mankind's wishes.
- Dom5: Nature will adjust itself to our wishes not the other way around.

The combination of the five items produces a scale that is sufficiently reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$). Scale scores for dominion were given to all respondents who had a valid score on at least four of the five items.

Stewardship has been measured by means of five Likert-type items about humankind's responsibility towards nature. Respondents were asked whether they agreed (“disagree strongly” through “agree strongly”) with the following statements:

- Stew1: We have got the earth/nature on loan and we must preserve her for the next generation.
- Stew2: Nature needs man's protection.
- Stew3: It's man's responsibility to take care of nature.
- Stew4: We have to respect the earth.
- Stew5: We will be held accountable for our interactions with nature.

The combination of the five items produces a scale that is reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$). Scale scores for stewardship were given to all respondents who had a valid score on at least four of the five items.

Eco-spirituality has been measured by means of four Likert-type items tapping into an understanding of nature as inherently sacred. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale to what extent they agreed (“disagree strongly” through “agree strongly”) with any of the following statements.

- Eco1: Nature is sacred in itself.
- Eco2: Every life is to a certain degree divine.
- Eco3: Nature is a source of spiritual powers.
- Eco4: Humans and animals are equal organisms produced by the same life force.

The combination of the four items once again produces a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$). Scale scores for eco-spirituality were given to all respondents who had valid scores on at least three of the four items.

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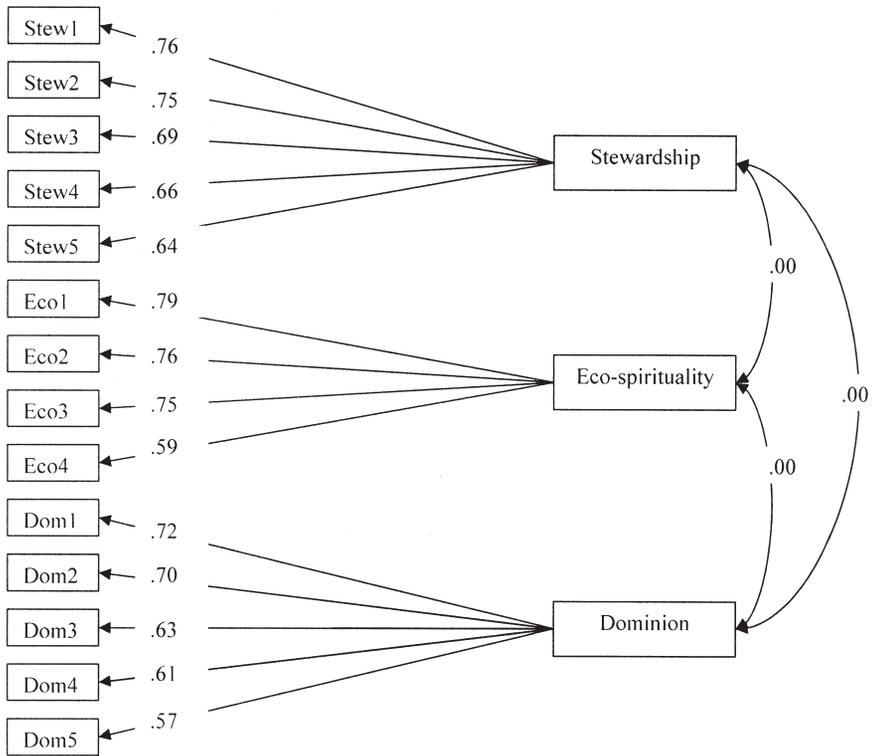


Figure 1 Factor analysis of 14 items measuring stewardship, eco-spirituality, and dominion (principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, factor loadings < 0.30 not shown, N = 2,121).

We have used factor analysis in order to establish whether the items used for the measurement of, respectively, dominion, stewardship and eco-spirituality represent three different constructs (Figure 1).

As shown in Figure 1, the factor analysis reveals that the 14 items do indeed represent the three intended constructs, so that the scales could be constructed by keeping the original items in place.

Christian dualism has been measured by means of respondents' agreement or disagreement ("disagree strongly" through "agree strongly") with six Likert-type items that express markedly dualistic Christian beliefs of the type commonly associated with Evangelicalism. We focus on religious beliefs instead of institutional embeddedness because it is not so much one's religious institutional embeddedness, but rather one's religious beliefs and convictions, that produce understandings of nature (cf. Guth et al., 1995). We have used an item that taps into biblical literalism ("The Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally") (Eckberg and Blocker, 1989) and have added items tapping into orthodox Christian beliefs which are listed below:

- Chr1: The devil really exists.
 Chr2: Adam and Eve really existed.
 Chr3: The Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally.
 Chr4: Hell really exists.
 Chr5: Heaven really exists.
 Chr6: There is a God who personally occupies himself with every human being.

The combination of the six items that we have used produces a highly reliable scale for Christian dualism (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$). Scale scores for Christian dualism were given to all respondents with valid scores on at least three of the six items.

Holistic spirituality has been measured by means of seven Likert-type items pertaining to three central aspects of it, with respondents asked to indicate on a five-point scale to what extent they agreed with each of these ("disagree strongly" through "agree strongly"). The first aspect is self-spirituality, i.e., the notion that the sacred lies "within" rather than "without", exemplified by the statement "Every person has a higher spiritual 'self' that can be awakened and enlightened." The second aspect pertains to belief in the existence of a spirit or life force that permeates the cosmos, measured with statements like "The entire universe springs from one universal spiritual energy." The third aspect of holistic spirituality, finally, is perennialism, the notion that all existing religious traditions essentially stem from and give access to the same underlying esoteric truth (Heelas, 1996). This is exemplified by the statement "The one and only true religion does not exist, but there are truths one can find in all religions of the world." All items used are listed below:

- Hol1: Personal spirituality is of more importance than allegiance to a religious tradition.
 Hol2: Every person has a higher spiritual "self" that can be awakened and enlightened.
 Hol3: There is some sort of spirit or life force which permeates all life.
 Hol4: The divine does not originate outside, but within every person.
 Hol5: The one and only true religion does not exist, but there are truths one can find in all religions of the world.
 Hol6: The cosmos is a living entity.

The combination of the seven items that we used produces a scale that reliably measures holistic spirituality (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$). Scale scores for holistic spirituality were given to all respondents with valid scores on at least four of the seven items.

We once again used factor analysis to determine the relationship between Christian dualism and holistic spirituality (Figure 2).

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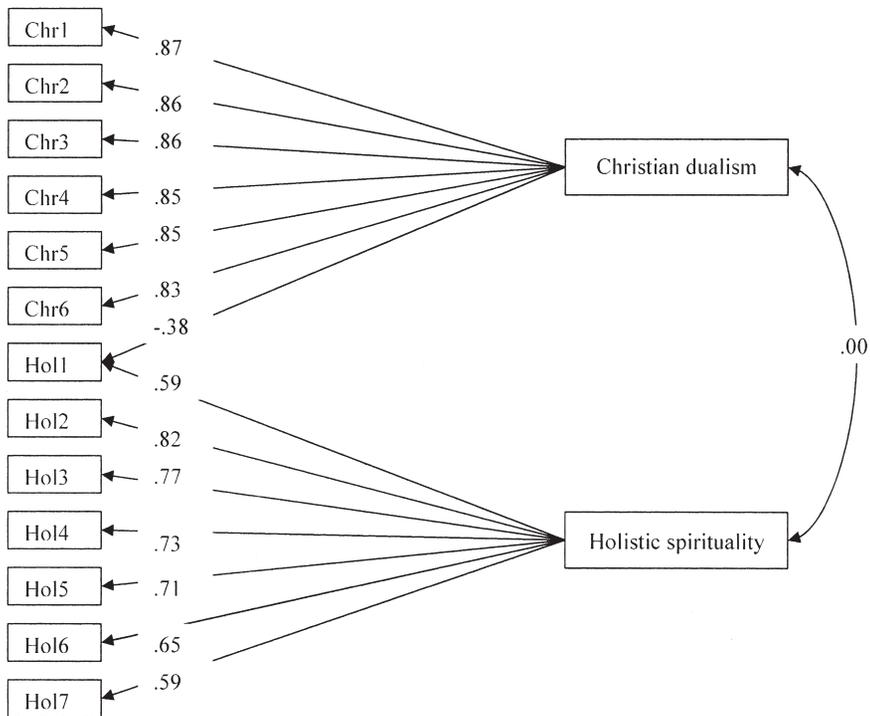


Figure 2 Factor analysis of 13 items measuring Christian dualism and holistic spirituality (principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, factor loadings < 0.25 not shown, N = 2,121).

As shown in Figure 2, the 13 items used to measure Christian dualism and holistic spirituality, respectively, do indeed tap into two different constructs. The zero-order correlation between the two scales moreover shows that the two are virtually unrelated (Pearson's r 0.104, $p < 0.001$).

Besides these two scales we also incorporated a measure that distinguishes between different understandings of the sacred. Respondents were asked to indicate which of the following convictions came closest to their own: 1) Belief in a personal God-creator; 2) Belief in a spirit or life force; 3) Both the idea of a personal God-creator and a spirit or life force are invalid; 4) Don't know what to believe. This measure was used in order to compare to what extent different conceptions of the sacred spark environmental consciousness.

5. Results

We start our analysis by examining whether there is a difference in environmental consciousness between Christian dualists and adherents of holistic

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Table 1 Environmental consciousness amongst Christian dualists, adherents to holistic spirituality, and non-believers.

| | <i>Belief in a personal God-creator</i> | <i>Belief in a spirit or life force</i> | <i>Both the idea of a personal God-creator and a spirit or life force are invalid</i> | <i>Don't know what to believe</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Not at all concerned | 90 20.9% | 106 14.6% | 114 23.8% | 75 18.1% | 385 18.8% |
| Not concerned | 78 18.1% | 131 18.0% | 81 16.9% | 79 19.1% | 369 18.0% |
| Nor concerned, nor unconcerned | 131 30.5% | 201 27.6% | 126 26.2% | 131 31.6% | 589 28.6% |
| Somewhat concerned | 45 10.5% | 95 13.0% | 52 10.8% | 41 9.9% | 233 11.4% |
| Very concerned | 86 20.0% | 195 26.8% | 107 22.3% | 88 21.3% | 476 23.2% |
| Total | 430 100% | 728 100% | 480 100% | 414 100% | 2052 100% |

spirituality, as is to be expected on the basis of the literature. The main results are presented in Table 1.

As can be witnessed from Table 1 there are indeed noticeable differences between both religious groups, and they are in the expected direction. People who believe in the existence of an immanent spirit or life force are shown to be substantially more concerned about environmental threats than those who believe in the existence of a personal God-creator. This finding corroborates our first hypothesis: spiritual holists on the whole are more conscious of the environment than Christian dualists. The first are also more conscious than both groups of non-religious people. Overall these differences are significant (Pearson's Chi-square(12) = 27.82, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1 furthermore shows that there are on average just as many Christian dualists who are unconscious as those that are conscious of the environment. This is also why, contrary to holistic spirituality (Pearson's $r = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), no relationship can be found between Christian dualism and environmental consciousness (Pearson's $r = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$). The absence of such a relationship corroborates the results of previous studies, which have also found at most minor differences between Christians and others when it comes to consciousness about the environment. As we have explained, it is however quite unclear what this zero-relationship means for the tenability of the dominion and stewardship theses.

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Table 2 Conceptions of nature explained by Christian dualism and holistic spirituality (Method=Enter).

| | <i>Dominion</i> | <i>Stewardship</i> | <i>Eco-spirituality</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Christian dualism | 0.36*** | 0.16*** | 0.11*** |
| Holistic spirituality | -0.02 (<i>n.s.</i>) | 0.06* | 0.56*** |
| Dominion | - | -0.13*** | -0.03 (<i>n.s.</i>) |
| Stewardship | -0.13*** | - | 0.18*** |
| Eco-spirituality | -0.05 (<i>n.s.</i>) | 0.26*** | - |
| <i>R</i> ² | 0.144 | 0.161 | 0.445 |
| N | 1,638 | 1,638 | 1,638 |

Regression analysis (one-sided test), coefficients are β's, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

As a second step in the analysis we therefore examined the conceptions of nature that underlie the ecological consciousness of Christian dualists and spiritual holists (Table 2). We have theorized that the relationship between Christian dualism and environmental consciousness is mediated by two different understandings of nature, namely dominion and stewardship. Table 2 shows that Christian dualism is indeed related to both dominion and stewardship, corroborating the notion that Christian dualists may embrace strikingly different understandings of the man-nature relationship that may have contradictory influences on their environmental consciousness. Perhaps more interesting is the weak relationship between Christian dualism and eco-spirituality. This finding contradicts the literature about holistic spirituality and environmental consciousness, which maintains that eco-spirituality is at odds with Christian dualism (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Hanegraaff, 1996).

Table 2 also shows that holistic spirituality is much more strongly related to eco-spirituality than Christian dualism, however, indicating that adherents of holistic spirituality are nonetheless much more inclined than Christian dualists to adopt a conception of nature as an inherently sacred entity. This also appears to be the principal reason for the former's higher levels of environmental consciousness. Although adherents of holistic spirituality may also subscribe to the stewardship notion that mankind has the responsibility to care for nature (Pearson's $r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), the model indicates that this is due to the fact that they adopt an eco-spiritual perspective on nature. As opposed to Christian dualism there exists no relation between holistic spirituality and dominion. We therefore conclude that holistic spirituality and Christian dualism produce different understandings of nature. Whereas Christian dualism shows the strongest affiliation with dominion and stewardship, holistic spirituality shows the strongest affiliation with an eco-spiritual outlook on nature.

Now that we have established that Christian dualism and holistic spirituality differ in their appropriations of the three conceptions of nature that

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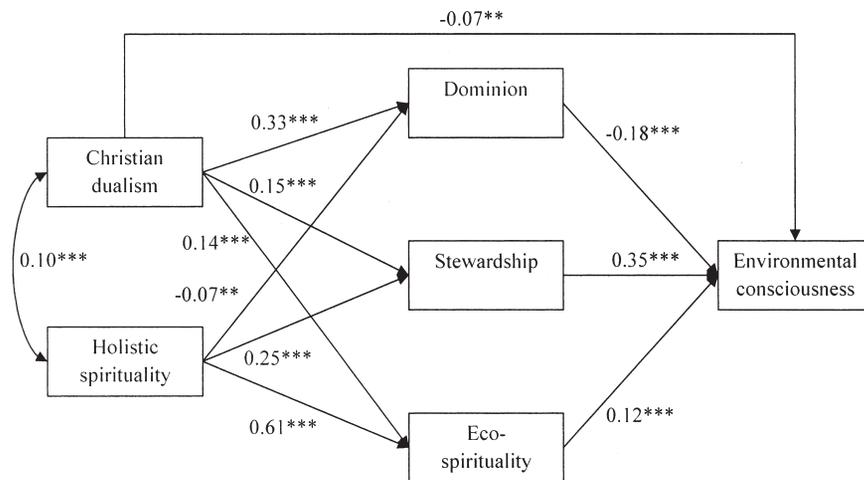


Figure 3 Environmental consciousness explained by Christian dualism, holistic spirituality, dominion, stewardship, and eco-spirituality.

Regression analysis (one-sided test), coefficients are β 's, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

we have distinguished, it is time to assess what this means for the associations between both types of religiosity and environmental consciousness. We have constructed a path model, which shows how the three understandings of nature influence environmental consciousness (Figure 3).

Figure 3 again shows that Christian dualism sparks both a dominion and a stewardship understanding of man's relationship to nature. Furthermore, it shows that dominion typically detracts from environmental consciousness, while stewardship typically adds to it. These results provide supporting evidence for the notion that dominion and stewardship work in reverse directions.

As such they also provide evidence in support of the dominion thesis as well as the stewardship thesis. On the one hand Christian dualists are indeed somewhat less conscious about the environment because of dominion. However, on the other hand there are also Christian dualists that are more conscious of the environment, and this is typically sparked by stewardship considerations. This corroborates our second hypothesis, according to which Christian dualists can equally adhere to dominion as well as stewardship, with the first detracting from environmental consciousness and the latter adding to it. This furthermore accounts for the circumstance that this study, just like earlier ones by others, have been able to establish only very weak or even absent negative relationships between Christian dualism and environmental consciousness. This does not mean that the dominion thesis is untenable, but that the stewardship thesis, which stimulates environmental consciousness among Christian dualists rather than detracting from it, is also tenable.

Eco-spirituality also plays a slight role in stimulating environmental consciousness among Christian dualists (cf. Kearns, 1996; 1997). However, as can be witnessed, it plays a much more important role among adherents of holistic spirituality. Their environmental consciousness is predominantly sparked by eco-spiritual considerations. This also confirms our third hypothesis: environmental consciousness among adherents of holistic spirituality stems from their belief in the sacredness of nature. This means that holistic spirituality and Christian dualism differ markedly when it comes to consciousness about the environment: the environmental consciousness of Christian dualists is principally driven by the notion that mankind has a religious obligation to care for nature, while among adherents of holistic spirituality it is rooted in the notion that nature is inherently sacred (cf. Taylor, 2010).

6. Conclusion and directions for future research

Our findings demonstrate that adherents of holistic spirituality do indeed feature higher levels of environmental consciousness than Christian dualists: this because of the embracement by the former of an eco-spiritual conception of nature. Moreover, among Christian dualists we find a divide between those embracing a notion of stewardship that increases environmental consciousness and those who adhere to dominion beliefs that instead detract from it. Finally, we find that whereas sympathy for stewardship exists among adherents of holistic spirituality, too, dominion beliefs are an exclusively Christian-dualistic affair. These findings point out that stewardship needs to be carefully distinguished from eco-spirituality (e.g., Attfeld, 2003; Beyer, 1994; Kearns, 1996; 1997), Christian environmental consciousness from its holistic spiritual counterpart (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Taylor, 2010), and “green religion (which posits that environmentally friendly behavior is a religious obligation) [from] dark green religion (in which nature is sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care)” (Taylor, 2010: 10).

Whereas we have found, just like previous studies, that Christian dualists in general do not feature lower levels of environmental consciousness, we nonetheless reject the suggestion of these studies that this means that the dominion thesis does not hold (e.g., Dekker, Ester and Nas, 1997; Greeley, 1993; Kanagy and Nelsen, 1995; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994). Our findings do rather indicate that the relationship between Christian dualism and environmental consciousness is not only mediated by dominion, but also by stewardship, which works in the reverse direction: while dominion detracts from Christian dualists’ environmental consciousness, stewardship rather adds to it. The point is hence not so much that the dominion thesis is invalid, but that the stewardship thesis is valid, too – at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the massively secularized Netherlands, we hasten to add. Combined with our substantial research findings, the latter limitation of our study calls for a contextualization of our findings in at least three different ways.

First, there are of course important questions of historical change and cross-national variation. Christian environmentalism has, after all, particularly expanded from the 1960s onwards (e.g., Fowler, 1995; Nash, 1989), which is the same period that has witnessed the rise and spread of the environmental movement and holistic “New Age” spirituality. This makes it likely that from the 1960s onwards, liberal-minded Christians have become increasingly receptive to the notion of stewardship, which is in itself not at all new to Christian theology (Passmore, 1980). Future research needs to establish whether the explanatory power of the dominion and stewardship theses have changed across time. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the explanatory power of the former has declined, while that of the latter increased in the past half century. A related question is whether the explanatory powers of the two vary cross-nationally, particularly between countries with a predominantly Catholic and a predominantly Protestant religious heritage: for historically speaking Christian dualism has always been more marked in Protestantism than in Catholicism (Weber, 1963 [1922]).

Second, future research needs to address how the three conceptions of nature are distributed across different Christian denominations, with a specific focus on orthodox dualistic Protestantism. Studies on Christian environmentalism have after all demonstrated that conservative and liberal Christians hold quite different perspectives on nature and the environment (e.g., Eckberg and Blocker, 1996; Guth et al. 1995; Kearns, 1996; 1997). Guth et al. (1995) observe that conservative evangelical Protestantism has even hindered the growth of Christian environmentalism, because of its tendency to associate environmentalism with holistic spirituality, understood as sinful and heretic. The other way around, stewardship may be expected to predominate among liberal Christians, probably Catholics and Protestants alike. A vital research questions concerns the specific religious beliefs that make those concerned receptive to stewardship (and perhaps in some instances even eco-spirituality) rather than dominion.

Third and finally, we must take into account that, historically speaking, Christian dualism has played a major role in bringing about the western secular worldview (Campbell, 2008; Weber, 1963 [1922]). One of the implications of this is that non-Christians will often subscribe to dominion and stewardship, too, as can for instance be seen from the fact that the latter’s associations with Christian dualism are far from perfect (they are indeed much weaker than the association between holistic spirituality and eco-spirituality). This calls for research into the probably changing historical roles of religious and secular dualistic worldviews in shaping (stewardship) and undermining (dominion) environmental consciousness. Thinking in particular of drastically secularized countries of northwestern Europe, it seems high time to explicitly (i.e., not as an implicit residual category) give this secularist dualism its due attention besides Christian dualism in studies about environmental consciousness.

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