Orthodox Christians and Muslims have been among the world’s foremost religious leaders on the care of the environment. Indeed, among them were those who were the earliest to draw attention to the current environmental crisis and call for action to prevent or reverse the devastating consequences that are now fully in view. For example, the Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr gave a series of lectures on the topic in 1966 (published in a volume the following year) and the Orthodox scholar Phillip Sherrard began his series of articles and studies in this area in 1973.\(^1\) Around the same time one can mark the beginning of a shift in attention among the science community toward climate change—such as the landmark conference in Boulder, Colorado in 1965 on the “Causes of Climate Change”—and the first trace of concern in the public mind over potential environmental consequences of climate change.\(^2\) In this regard, sending man into space and bringing back images of Earth from the moon began to alter attitudes about the planet and point to the need to protect it. As Spenser

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Weart put it, “Astronauts walk on the Moon, and people perceive the Earth as a fragile whole.”

Lynn White’s article from 1967 is often seen as the spark that started the debate in the West over the degree to which Christianity should be held responsible for modern day environmental degradation and it is also true that in a similar way “critics have tried to include Islam in the same category.” White’s work has become a classic in environmental literature and has inspired many Christians and secularists to think seriously about environmental ethics. Yet as John Chryssavgis and Bruce Foltz have pointed out, White “explicitly exempts Christians of the East from his critique, commending rather than censuring its view of creation.” Indeed, Eastern Christianity has been on a different track, or at the very least in speaking about relations between man and the natural world “holds a set of views that is not entirely absent in Western thought but that have not been grasped in their synergistic integrity outside Eastern lands.”

This unique perspective and approach to the environmental crisis can also be seen among Muslim scholars and religious leaders. In fact, Orthodox Christian and Muslim thought converge on this topic in very interesting and important ways, which have not been fully explored. Together they have centuries of spiritual and theological writings from which to make the case that humans have not only the responsibility to protect the planet but also that they are directly connected to nature in significant ways. Having a better appreciation of these insights could be quite useful in informing efforts across the sciences and humanities to stem the devastating consequences of global warming and help re-establish a healthier relationship between humans and the earth.

3 Ibid., 204.
7 Ibid., 3.