

HOW RELIGION CAN PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT



Abstracts of Proceedings XXVII World Religions Conference

Held November 24, 2007
University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Representatives of
**Aboriginal Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism,
Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Atheism**

Organized by the
Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam of Canada



Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to the speakers representing various faiths and philosophical traditions, for participating in this conference and providing an abstract of their speech on the theme “How Religion Can Protect the Environment” for the 27th World Religions Conference. These abstracts are compiled in this booklet for easy future reference.

In the staging of this conference, we have received support and help from numerous organizations and individuals and it is not possible to list them all. In addition to the speakers and guests that attended the event, we acknowledge the contributions of all our partner organizations; The City of Waterloo, The City of Kitchener, One Waterloo Campaign of Federation of Students, The University of Waterloo and the Federation of Students, Ahmadiyya Muslim Students Association of UW, the Hindu Club of UW, Brahmarishi Mission of Canada, K-W Council of Churches, Sikh Students' Association, Waterloo Riverview Dharma Centre, Bhante Mitra's Dharma Group, Aboriginal Counselling Services of UW, Aboriginal Students' Association, the Society of Ontario Freethinkers, InterFaith Grand River, The Record and Guelph Mercury, CKCO-CTV, Across Boundaries Multifaith Institute (Toronto), YWCA, KW Multicultural Centre, KW Counselling Services, BOSS Inc, Callture and the Cross Cultures magazine.

Moreover, we recognize the cooperation and volunteer services of the Conference moderator - CTV's David Imrie, and the volunteer services of the entire WRC team, WRC Organizing Committee and of over a 100 other volunteers who worked with great enthusiasm for the organization of this conference.

Nabeel A. Rana
Chief Planning Officer,
XXVIIth World Religions Conference,
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

November 24, 2007

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Introduction to the World Religions Conference

The World Religions Conference is a unique learning experience that offers delegates from diverse faith communities and philosophical traditions a wonderful opportunity to exchange ideas and explore topical issues in a spirit of mutual respect.

This was so envisioned by the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community over a century ago.

The Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community describing the concept of this conference writes:

"It is one of the principles, on which I have been established, and which has specifically been revealed to me, by God Himself, that all religions, revealed by God, through His prophets, are true; such religions, as have met with wide acceptance, in certain regions of the world and have survived all challenges and have guided mankind for ages. According to this principle, such religions are essentially true and their founders were most certainly true prophets of God This is a most attractive and peace-giving principle. It provides the basis for reconciliation among nations and promotes better moral conduct. It teaches us to believe in the truth of all the prophets, wherever they might have appeared; in India, in Persia, in China or any other country and for whom God has filled the hearts of millions of people, with awe and deep respect and has caused their religions to firmly establish roots. "

(Tohfa Qaisariyyah p. 256, 259)

"I am certain that such a conference will be highly effective for the dissemination of truth. Each party will present the beauties of their respective faiths in a polite and civilized manner, without casting any aspersions on other religions. I take responsibility

that such a conference will be held in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility"

(Majmoa-e-Ishtaharaat Vol. 2, p 198)

Every year a theme is selected as a topic for deliberations at this event, and an invitation is sent to numerous representatives of various faiths for participation. It is very encouraging that distinguished scholars, representing a multiplicity of faiths and beliefs, come together in a spirit of brotherhood. These deliberations, as they are based on a mutual respect for each other's differences, are an example to all who attend, and a valuable lesson of unity and accepting others.

We affirm the value of interfaith interactions for enriching our awareness of the Divine Being in the world. The Interfaith concept is a unifying vehicle that can aid us in bringing the reformation of the world nearer to reality.

Sincerely

Lal Khan Malik
National President
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Canada

November 24, 2007
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Message from the The Right Honourable Stephen J. Harper, Prime Minister of Canada



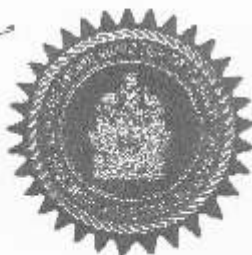
PRIME MINISTER • PREMIER MINISTRE

It is with great pleasure that I extend my warmest greetings to all those attending the 27th World Religious Conference at the University of Waterloo.

This unique event — the largest multi-faith conference of its kind in Canada — brings together individuals from a wide range of religious beliefs and philosophical traditions to explore issues of shared concern. Members of faith communities have an integral part to play in promoting tolerance, openness, and understanding toward others. The fact that you have been assembling in a spirit of dialogue and congeniality for almost three decades speaks to your commitment to fostering mutual understanding, respect and acceptance and, thus, to making the world a better place.

I am certain that the theme of this year's conference, "How Religion Can Protect the Environment," will stimulate a great deal of enlightening and thought-provoking discussion, and that this event will continue to thrive as an inspiring gathering where ideas can flourish for the common good.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, please accept my best wishes for a pleasant and productive meeting.



OTTAWA
2007

Message from the Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario



Premier of Ontario – Premier ministre de l'Ontario

November 24, 2007

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, I am delighted to extend warm greetings to everyone attending the 27th World Religions Conference, organized by the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam and hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Students Association, University of Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier University.

Like all of you here, my colleagues and I embrace the religious and cultural diversity that breathes life into our province. A peaceful, prosperous future for all humanity rests on our ability to build bridges and gain a greater understanding of one another. The World Religions Conference embodies these very values as it brings together people of different beliefs in a spirit of cross-cultural and interfaith appreciation and acceptance.

For more than a quarter-century, this annual convention has been providing people of faith from across Canada with a unique opportunity to promote tolerance and interfaith respect. I am confident that the theme of this year's conference — *How Religion Can Protect the Environment* — will continue the tradition of inspiring members of your communities.

I commend everyone in attendance for participating in this significant initiative, and I offer my best wishes for a memorable and inspirational gathering.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dalton McGuinty".

Dalton McGuinty
Premier

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Buddhist Perspective

Coming Home- the Essential Practice of Inner Ecology

Scott Mackay
Buddhist Practitioner

We are what we think. All that we are arises within our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world. Speak or act with an impure mind and trouble will follow you as the wheel follows the ox that pulls the cart. Speak or act with a pure mind, and happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakeable.

The Buddha, *Dhammapada*

Many people use the term Ecology to describe the living world and its web of interrelationships, including humanity. Often it is used to denote that which is “out there” - beyond city limits, beyond 'us'- the environment, nature. The term comes from the Greek word for home- 'Oikos', and is more accurately the study of (-ology) home-where we live, what we live within, what sustains us and what we are connected to.

Buddhism sets out a very specific practice of what could be called 'inner ecology'- the study of our living inner experience and how it shapes and informs our outer experience and actions. Key to this practice are investigation and knowledge of both our beliefs or worldviews and our motivations, which in the chain of moment-by-moment experience are precursors to our moods, our perceptions, our thoughts, and our actions.

Some common, underlying worldviews held by many in our society are that satisfaction can be achieved through consumption of the pleasant (things, experiences) and avoidance of the unpleasant, that we are primarily individuals and separate from other beings, that as individuals we must struggle and compete in order to survive and succeed, that technology will eventually solve all problems and reveal all mysteries, and that the only truths are those which can be

objectively verified. There are problems and side-effects which arise from living according to these worldviews, not the least of which is the steady procession of environmental problems which follow in the wake of human “progress”.

Entwined with these worldviews are typically some universal and noble human motivations- the desire for happiness, for truth, and to know our place in the world and act accordingly.

Several alternate worldviews are proposed by Buddhism- that peace and happiness are achieved through freedom from desire, that our actions and our experience of the world are deeply connected to other beings, and that problems are solved and mysteries revealed mainly through intuitive insights based on careful observation. These worldviews, together with the Buddhist practices of meditation, reflection, and renunciation, and awakening of the natural human capacity for objective awareness (mindfulness), provide a comprehensive path for living in line with *Dharma*- the natural way of things.

The speaker will discuss connections between the Buddhist path of practice and environmental sustainability, and will add to the discussion with quotes from the Buddhist scriptures, as well as natural images.

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Sikh Perspective

Sikhi and the Environment

Tejdeep Singh Chatta
Founder of SikhsAgainstGeocide.com

Pavan Guru, Pani Pita, Mata Dharath Mehath

Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and the Earth is the Great Mother of all.

These are the words of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founder of the Sikh religion, and this is the respect that we owe to the Environment.

Guru Nanak took physical form in 1469 in the village of Talwandi. Guru Nanak came at a time of social turmoil. Women were oppressed, the practice of Sati was prevalent where the wife was burnt alive along with her husband upon the husband's death. The low castes were segregated and not treated as humans, Babur and his army were brutally killing and oppressing the people in their conquest of conquering what is now known as India. This is the social context in which Guru Nanak was born.

Bhai Gurdas Ji, writes, "As is the reflection in the mirror. He sees in the world his ownself." The current state of the human race is a reflection of the instability and weaknesses within us. The increasing barrenness of earth's terrain is a reflection of the emptiness within the human race.

What Guru Nanak brought to this world was a solution, a solution which would empower those who subscribed to it. A solution which would uplift humankind, free people of the 5 evils, lust, anger, attachment, ego, and greed, and open up our eyes to see god in all organisms including humans, plants, and animals.

khaalik khalak khalak mehi khaalik poor rehiou srab thaanee

The Creation is in the Creator, and the Creator is in the Creation,

totally pervading and permeating in all places.

The Creation and the creator are inseparable. God is in us, god is all around us. One must first recognize the divine light within oneself before seeing it in others. Recognizing it, one must cherish it, nurture it, and fulfill it. Through meditation and selfless service of gods creations one is enlightened. One starts to see god in all, and is compassionate to all of god's creations.

Concern for the environment is part of an integrated approach to life and nature. The origin and end of the creation is in god, and it operates within his system. The creation is a manifestation of god, every creature, plant, and every form. God is the cause of all and he is the connection between all existence. Humans must have consciousness of their place in creation and their relationship with the rest of creation, without this, one cannot find harmony within themselves or with god.

Jis Naam Ridhai Tis Prgat Pahara

"One who keeps Naam in their heart sees the Lord manifested in His Creation."

Guru Nanak showed the path of living a pure, complete, and spiritual lifestyle whilst living in this world like a floating Lotus flower on a muddy swamp. The Sikh Guru's were activists that showed respect for all organisms, human and non-human. The Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai made beautiful gardens, opened an animal sanctuary, and opened a medical herb centre in Kiratpur Sahib, showing compassion to humans, animals, and the environment.

Living in harmony with god implies living in harmony with all of existence, all of god's creations. This means supporting human rights, animal rights, the environment, and standing against injustice to anyone or anything. The Sikh Gurus, through their lives, were role models for the Sikhs. They all actively worked to stress the equality of all humans and challenged the rigid social stratification of the caste system in India. The Sixth Guru only left jail when the condition was met that all 52 innocent political prisoners would enjoy justice and freedom with him. The Ninth Guru sacrificed his life for the human rights and freedom of others.

The traditional Sikh lifestyle is based on organic materials and ensures the use of the least resources, and the reusing and recycling of materials. The Sikh Guru's established cities created around a religious centre focused on a lifestyle of sharing, fairness, and the optimal utilization of resources. Even today rural areas in Punjab share resources with their neighbors.

The Sikh Guru's has taught us to live a life which does not harm our mind, body, or soul. This is why Sikhs do not consume Tobacco, alcohol, or any other intoxicant, and keep a simple vegetarian diet. A Sikh is compassionate to all and as a result can not tolerate the suffering or cruelty of any organism.

In conclusion, all life is interconnected, just as the organs that make up the human body rely on each other; the life forms of this earth are always intertwined. A human being needs to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Sikhs believe in the “environmental ethic” dedicated to the awareness of the sacred relationship between humans and the environment, which is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival.

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Hindu Perspective

Ecological Concerns within Vedic Hindu Dharma How to live in Harmony with Nature

Chandrakant Kothari
Brahmarishi Mission of Canada

Environment is not a new concern to the ancient and eternal Vedic spiritual civilization. Well before David Suzuki and Al Gore and his 'Inconvenient Truth' Hindus have been aware of the adverse effect of human activities on ecosystem. In fact, if Hinduism is about anything, it is about leaving as small a footprint on Mother Earth as possible. Consequently care and respect of the creation is woven throughout the fabric of our culture and society. From times immemorial to this day and age, Hindus generally hold profound sense of reverence for the whole cosmos including stars in distant galaxies to pebbles on the nearby beach.

Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuram composed more than five thousand years ago considers, all solids, liquids, gases, chemical and physical reactions between them, energy, time and space, entire universe comprising of galaxies, stars, and planets, rivers and the oceans, mountains and the hills, as organs of God's body and thus enjoins the humanity to respect each and every manifestation of this Ultimate Reality.

Similarly the Vedas pay very sublime homage to Mother Nature as follows, "O Mother Earth! Sacred are your hills and snowy mountains, dense forests and deep oceans. May you remain fertile and arable! May you nourish us all and bestow upon us full satisfaction! May you protect us from your anger (natural disasters)! May you continue to support all species, races and nations and may no one exploit and subjugate you or any of your children!" It is a spiritual requirement for every Hindu to plant trees as a form of worship of the Divine. Go any evening to the banks of Indian rivers and you will see huge crowds offering homage to these holy arteries of mother earth. How many of us will desecrate our forests, lakes and rivers if we hold them sacred like our ancestors did?

Thus, Hindus do not consider Earth as simply a planet to be exploited for fulfilling our endless desires, but as our living breathing mother. How many of us are willing to exploit our own mothers? And yet that is exactly what we have been doing despite our claims of being intelligent and compassionate!

To summarize, all pre-monotheistic spiritual traditions whether so called Paganism or Shamanism, and particularly Hinduism, had and continues to have a profound sense of reverence and gratitude for the entire cosmos and everything within it. Therefore, there is a natural inbred tendency of not damaging the environment and a preference for protecting the nature that surrounds us.

However, in time, this respect for the nature was replaced with two new beliefs. In a nutshell and very simplified form, one of these two dominant ideologies prevalent today is known as monotheism according to which there is a Creator of this world and only He variously known as Yahweh, God or Allah is divine and nothing else beside Him is sacred. In fact, those of us who continue to hold various manifestations of nature, such as rivers and the lakes and forests and the trees as sacred are rebuked as idolaters, heathens or infidels. Also this widely prevalent theism releases us from the consequences of our karma with promises of salvation and heavenly afterlife as long as we believe in God or Allah. More than anything else, this relatively new doctrine separated Creator from his creation effectively driving out divinity from nature resulting in current environmental crisis!

Opposing this belief is a couple of centuries old, equally doctrinaire conviction of scientific materialism according to which there is no God, no Creator and no Divinity. We are here by chance; our existence has neither any purpose nor meaning. This is the one and only life we have to live and therefore, we must live it to the fullest extent possible by fulfilling our endless and insatiable desires regardless of the cost and the consequences!

It is time for those still believing in Mechanistic Universe, and Survival of the Fittest to realize that quantum physics and other current branches of science have substantially reduced our collective pride of

being all knowing! Therefore, we need to be humble, and realize that science explains us very limited laws of nature but does not provide us the necessary wisdom. Science will give us technology but what we also need is intelligence to avoid being prey to our own technological tools of mass destructions! However, such understanding will never dawn on us if we continue to consider life as devoid of purpose! What a waste of millions of years of evolutionary process! Therefore, those who subscribe to scientific materialism, if you want to help protect our environment, please acquire a purpose. Let that purpose be respect, reverence, and care of Mother Nature.

However, far greater onus is on us within different faith groups as faith has powers to move mountains. Faith is emotional and our emotions, almost always predominate reason within us. Therefore, we in the faith community have far greater powers than those in science to bring in a paradigm shift in the way we and our followers think and the way we and they behave.

Therefore...Envisage a world where from every pulpit and every platform, priests, pundits, philosophers, mullahs and gurus are preaching a new all encompassing spiritual, ethical, moral message of our interconnectedness and interdependence with restored reverence and respect for the whole creation rather than a sole sacredness of a Creator. After all, Creator being omnipotent will do just fine without us; it is His creation that needs our adulation and protection to stop us from our paths of environment destruction! Let's preach a new admiration for air, water and earth which are the real sources of our lives. We can live without God but we cannot live without them. Let's advocate a non violent way of life beginning with what we are consuming. Instead of promising people heaven in after life, let us guide them towards creating heaven on earth right here and right now. That is only the way we can live in peace and harmony with nature and help protect our environment.

Insa Allah such wisdom will down on us before it is too late. Amen!
Salaam Alecom. May peace be with you. Aum Shanti, Shanti, Shantih
Aum! (May peace prevail throughout the universe)

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Islamic Perspective

Naseem Mahdi
Senior Vice President and Missionary Incharge
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Canada

The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in their February 2007 report, based on the work of some 2,500 scientists in more than 130 countries, concluded that humans have caused all or most of the current planetary warming. Global warming is not a problem that may occur in the far off future -- global warming is happening now -- and scientists have evidence that humans are directly to blame.

Average temperatures have climbed almost one degree Celsius around the world since 1880 with much of this increase having taken place in recent decades. Industrialization, deforestation, and pollution have greatly increased atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. Sea level could rise between 18 to 59 centimeters by the end of this century resulting in widespread flooding along coastal areas. Natural disasters have been occurring at unprecedented levels and countless numbers of species are on the verge of extinction.

What is interesting to note is that the Holy Qur'an had already discussed matters pertaining to man's interaction with the environment over a thousand years ago.

Environmental pollution has been clearly prophesized by the Qur'an. The Qur'an points out that this phenomenon will occur as a result of man's own hands and that man will have to taste the fruits of his works in order to turn back from his previous wrong doings. *"Corruption has appeared on land and seas because of what men's hands have wrought that He may make them taste the fruit of some of their doings, so that they may turn back from evil."* (30:42)

The Qur'an presents Allah as the perfect Creator who has created the

universe to operate in perfect harmony. There is no incongruity in His creation. However, in recent times, man has been upsetting the natural equilibrium of the Earth which has resulted in a host of environmental problems. *“Who has created seven heavens in harmony. No incongruity canst thou see in the creation of the Gracious God. Then look again: Seest thou any flaw?”* (67:4) *“And the Heaven He has raised high and set up measure that you may not transgress the measure. So weigh all things in justice and fall not short of the measure.”* (55: 8-10)

The Qur’an also goes as far as to mention the ozone layer as well as the damage that would eventually occur to the ozone layer. *“So He completed them in the form of seven heavens in two days, and He revealed to each heaven its function. And We adorned the lowest heaven with lamps for light and provided it with the means of protection. That is the decree of the Mighty, the All-Knowing”* (41:13) *“And when (different kinds of) holes will be made in the sky.”* (77:10)

The Qur’an has emphasized the responsibilities that the wealthy and those in power have to the less fortunate and poor. It has also prohibited waste and unnecessary extravagance. It is because of man's failure to fulfill his obligations to his environment and his fellow man that many of our current problems have arisen. *“And give thou to the kinsman his due, and to the poor and the wayfarer, and squander not thy wealth extravagantly. Verily, the extravagant are brothers of satans, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord.”* (17:27-28) *“... and eat and drink but exceed not the bounds; surely, He does not love those who exceed the bounds.”* (7:32)

The Qur’an has pointed out that the worst polluters will tend to be those who are in power or authority over others. The Qur’an warns such parties that their actions create discord in the world and thus incur the displeasure of Allah. *“And when he is in authority, he runs about in the land to create disorder in it and destroy the crops and the progeny of man; and Allah loves not disorder.”* (2:206) *“Seek not to make mischief in the earth, verily Allah loves not those who make mischief”* (28:78)

However, the Qur’an also provides mankind a message of hope by stating that though man has committed excesses against himself, he should not despair of the mercy of Allah as Allah forgives all sins. *“Say, O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins. Verily He is*

Most Forgiving, Merciful.” (39:54)

The Qur'an provides hope for mankind if man becomes mindful of his responsibilities both in regards to the safekeeping of the Earth as well as his fellow man. For there to be hope, man must take responsibility for his past indiscretions by engaging in sincere prayers and changing his destructive ways.

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Jewish Perspective

Dr. Daniel M. Berry
Temple Shalom Waterloo

The Jewish tradition concerning preservation of the environment is derived, as is all of Jewish tradition, from the Bible in general, and the Torah, the Bible's first five books, in specific. An examination of some relevant passages, including Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, Exodus 20:10, Leviticus 19:19, Numbers 35:4, and Deuteronomy 29:19, 22:6-7, and 23:12, reveals contradictory commandments from God.

Jewish tradition, in general, encourages questioning of authority, even God's authority, in an attempt to come to a clear and thorough understanding of God's plan for the world and of God's commandments to us as people and as Jews. Indeed, all of the oral law, the rabbinic discussions of the law, and other commentary are devoted to coming to just this understanding. With this active questioning of the Bible and these discussions, Jewish tradition has come to the understanding that the resolution of most issues involves a balance between several seemingly conflicting commands. This balance is certainly true for human behavior in general.

This balance is even more true in coming to grips with man and his position in nature, both as a user of nature and as the one entrusted by God with preserving the nature that God created. The Bible instructs us both (1) to use nature to preserve and advance human life and society and (2) to preserve nature in order to allow continued preservation and advancement of human life and society. Commentary derived from the Bible as much as two thousand years ago instruct us to do things that we are seeing now as absolutely essential to preserve this planet of ours and to sustain human life as we know it.

Berry's presentation will describe the Jewish practice of questioning for the purpose of understanding, some relevant Biblical passages, and some of the commentary that suggests things that we need to do to save the environment.

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Christian Perspective

Darren Kropf
Mennonite Central Committee Ontario

In his article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. declared Christianity is the cause of our environmental crisis, stating that Christianity “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.” Are his stinging accusations that Christians are partly to blame for the mess our world finds itself in accurate? Unfortunately, in some instances, yes. Throughout the tradition there have been movements that have stressed a piety that pits the spiritual against the material. For some, to be Christian means to turn away from the material world and live in a spiritual realm that negates the earth as devalued and inherently worthless. Consequently, when the environment lacks sacredness humans are given free reign to manipulate it to their wishes.

But is this devaluing of creation true to the Christian message? Does it fit Jesus' message of hope and reconciliation? Is it Biblically rooted? Not in the least, and many Christians are working hard to dispel these misconceptions of our role in relation to the environment. A Christian environmental ethic is being rediscovered by many present-day Christians, based on a number of key Biblical and theological concepts.

First, a Christian environmental ethic affirms that creation is sacred and loved by God. In our creation stories we are told very clearly that God is the creator of all things, and that God has created the entire world to be good. In fact, God declared it very good! Furthermore, God provided clear direction that all of creation, both human and nonhuman, ought to be fruitful and multiply so that life may abound. Humans have a specific role in this creation, to tend and care for creation in a form of servant-like dominion. Too often this dominion has been misunderstood to be mean dominating and exploiting, rather than protecting and nurturing. Thankfully, however, there are many individuals throughout the Christian tradition that give creation

the proper respect it deserves. Many see the created order, along with the Bible, as a primary source of revelation by which we come to know God. The beauty of creation points us to the beauty of the Creator who brought into existence an earth of incredible majesty, inspiration and fruitfulness.

While creation is indeed still good, it is also subject to the bondages of sin. It is clear that creation is groaning with all the many environmental challenges facing it. Just as we humans are in need of a liberating redeemer for our sins, so too is creation in need of redemption, made possible by the grace of Jesus Christ. A Christian environmental ethic is centred on a holistic Christology that includes creation in the reconciling work of Jesus. Our redeemer seeks to bring all of creation to a state of healing and wholeness, as Collosians 2:19-20 puts so succinctly: “For God was pleased to have all God's fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

On a practical level, what does it mean if creation is bound for redemption in Christ? It means we have hope for a world in peril! God ultimately seeks to bring creation back to its intended state of balance and orderliness. Thus, any efforts we do to care for creation now becomes a part of the grand unfolding story of God's reconciling work in the world. Though our efforts may seem small, they are one means by which God works through us to bring healing to the earth. So the next time someone tells you riding your bike won't make a difference in the grand scheme of climate change you can scoff at such a notion, for where disciples act in faithfulness to God their actions become a part of the inbreaking presence of the Holy Spirit. Now that's something to feel inspired about in the midst of considerable peril.

If it hasn't become apparent by now, let it be clear that a Christian environmental ethic declares that all of creation is eternally significant. Rather than bound for chaos and destruction like some Christian eschatological movements have stressed, creation is actually meant to become the paradise it was intended to be. Throughout the Bible, we are told of great visions where the heavenly realm and the earthly realm become one. The paradise that is to come is a redeemed

and renewed version of the earth we have now, where pain and suffering are no more. All species live in harmony with one another and with God who dwells among us and within us. Certainly we have a long way to go before we reach this reality, but we need not resign ourselves to a state of resigned complacency until this occurs. Throughout the Christian tradition inspiring prophets and everyday disciples have declared that the Kingdom of God is among us, for those who have the eyes to see it. While we may not experience the Kingdom of God in its fullest, we can embody parts of it by restoring habitats, speaking out against destruction and living sustainably.

Certainly, Christians have a lot of work to do before we are living in harmony with creation. There still remains an unhealthy dichotomy between body and spirit that pits the sinful earthly realms versus the holy spiritual realm. Yet it is clear that Christ seeks wholeness in body and spirit for his disciples, embracing both aspects of human existence as divinely inspired. Christ came to bring hope and healing to all of creation, and it is this belief that ought to inspire us to care for creation. The environment can't take much more of our destructive attitudes towards it, so the time is now for us to work at reconciliation for the earth, by proclaiming in word and action a message of hope and healing for the entire created order.

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Humanist Perspective

Humanism and The Environment

Doug Thomas
Society of Ontario FreeThinkers

Humanists, agnostic or atheist, do not consider intervention from a supernatural being to correct environmental problems to be possible or even likely. Human beings must accept total responsibility for the results of human action.

Humanists are natural defenders of the environment. Central to our philosophy is the clear understanding that since there is no supreme being or other paranormal force to look after us, we are responsible for our own acts and the consequences of those acts. Humanists understand that our evolved senses and reasoning abilities are the only real tools available to help us keep the Earth's environment habitable for human beings, our fellow fauna, and flora. We human beings are not special in the Universe except that we seem to be the species that has developed the most reasoning ability, at least on this planet.

In addition, we Humanists are neither distracted nor comforted by any notion of an afterlife or alternate existence beyond this one. This is it. What we sow here, we reap here; nowhere and "nowhen" else. Consider where we are meeting today. At this moment, we don't care very much whether it is raining or sunny outside, because we are in a man-made environment. Every brick in the walls of this edifice exists at the expense of the environment. The manufacture of each and every one of them has resulted in a finite amount of clay being removed from the natural geological cycle and the production of an identifiable amount of carbon dioxide.

Were we meeting on this very spot ten or twenty thousand years ago, we would simply have gathered on this hill, perhaps around a large fire. We would have been intimately aware of whether or not it was raining and which way the wind was blowing; environmental factors that we now can ignore, except for a short time while we get from

inside this building to inside our cars. The fire we would be gathered around would modify our environment; not nearly on the scale of the construction of this room, but it would be a start on the long path that has brought us to this convergence of technology and environment.

You see, we human beings are the only animals that intensively and extensively modify our environment by altering its chemical state. We started with simple fire, but as our knowledge has increased, we have developed a larger bag of tricks, to modify raw materials, often using fire as a means to do so. The resulting steel, plastic, and myriad of other materials that we have created, have not only used raw materials, but have modified our environment by changing the very chemistry of natural elements often displacing them from the environmental cycle.

We have, as a result of being able to modify our environment, developed into the most major consumers and, potentially, the most powerful allies of the ecosystem should we choose to be. And choose to be we must, for we are the only entities with the know-how and ability to stop and even reverse the effects of our modifications.

The worst problem, in many ways, is the automobile. In Western Culture, and I suspect, by way of the infectious influence of television and motion pictures, in most cultures now, the automobile is one of our most prized status symbols. We own and drive them as our largest piece of jewellery. SUVs are the new “girl’s best friend”; never mind the psychological substitution process involved with men and their trucks.

As Humanists, we know that we must override these dogmatic social behaviours in order to make an ecological difference. We need to see cars only as a last-resort means of transportation. Getting business executives to ride buses to work each day does require that our transit companies cease to become proactive in their quest for business. Perhaps redesigning buses with individual compartments, that could become status symbols in themselves, might make the difference. How difficult is that?

In the 1970s governments challenged the solar energy industry to reduce the cost and raise the efficiency of solar energy systems. That industry met all of those targets ten years ago. Why, then, have we not

abandoned our fossil fueled domestic water heaters for solar heaters? The reason is simple. All those economic targets were based on \$90 a barrel oil – a level we have only recently reached. But, more significantly, none of those targets included the cost of carbon dioxide emissions. When we consider investing in solar and wind energy systems we must include not only the savings in \$ operating costs, but carbon dioxide savings as well.

We must become capitalists of the environment. Our investment must include intelligent effort and some of our assumed right to endless convenience. The profit must be a greener, more benign planetary envelope that is closer to the way we found it.

To reiterate our central Humanist philosophy, there is no supreme being onto whom to transfer the responsibility for environmental problems. No supernatural being is available to rescue us, use us as some kind of clinical experiment, or test us with some kind of “end-of-days redemption” scenario. We human beings must use our Humanism and our intelligence to survive.

Because of our technological skills and ability to modify our environment, we are the problem: with our technological skills and our ability to modify our environment, we can be, indeed must be, the solution.

How Religion Can Protect the Environment Aboriginal Spiritual Perspective

Belief System of the Haudenosaunee

Jake Swamp
Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)

According to oral history from ancient times there was another land up above in the sky world. This land was inhabited by beings who cherished the tree of life. One day a woman who was pregnant came to the base of the tree of life in her quest to satisfy her hunger. She couldn't find anything to satisfy her craving, thus she started to dig at the roots of the tree of life. As she dug deeper a dark hole appeared. The woman suddenly fell through the hole and started to fall from the sky. The birds saw her falling and they went up to her and spread their wings under her to support her fall. There was nothing but water down below, so the giant sea turtle emerged and offered his back to support the woman. The water animals realized the woman needed soil so they took turns diving deep to the bottom to try and retrieve some soil. Some drowned in the process, but the muskrat was successful in bringing up some soil. Than sky woman started to spread the soil in a counter clock direction singing a song as she went. Sky woman gave birth to a female being. Relations between the West Wind and the Sun impregnated the woman and later gave birth to twin boys. One boy was born the normal way and the other came out through her underarm and killed his mother in the process. These two twins became good and evil. The good twin would create something and the evil one would try to spoil it. So, for everything good in life there is always the opposite. The darkness and the light, hot and cold, evil and good, etc. The good twin created man and woman and thus gave them their original instruction on how to live on the land. The creator instructed the man and woman to populate the earth with people and that they should be thankful for all the gifts that were given in life to support them. The man was given an instruction to be protective toward all living things, for he was given the physical strength. The woman was instructed to be the nurturer of the children and families that live on earth.

Ceremony

The Haudenosaunee people of the long house believe that life itself is a ceremony. The people of the long house follow a ceremonial cycle of thanksgiving throughout the whole year. The mid-winter ceremonies involve eight days of rituals that prepare the people for the coming of the new year. The mid winter ceremonies include the naming of all the new babies that are born to the nation and clan families. The eight days is inclusive of the ancient speeches being expressed along with ancient music. As the winter snows subside and spring arrives the maple tree sap starts to flow and the people are excited to perform a thanksgiving for the arrival of the first food of the new year. After some number of days passes after the maple ceremony, the people will now prepare a great feast to honor the ancestors who have passed into the spirit world. As the warmer weather arrives the people prepare themselves for the great seed ceremony in preparing for the planting of crops. At the start of summer in the moon of ripening berries, the people prepare for a strawberry ceremony to honor all fruits and berries of the world. Several weeks later the green beans are ready to be picked, the people organize the thanksgiving festivities to honor the foods that grow on mother earth. Next, will be the green corn ceremony that will be held to give thanks for its ripening again for people to enjoy. As the season turns into fall the crops are ready to be harvested and put away for winter's use. The people get ready for a great harvest festival. The festivities will last for several days as the ancient speeches of honor are recited. Each day of the festival the songs of old are sung, a great renewal of hope and thanksgiving is expressed through the dances performed by the people. As the first snow arrives the people congregate to offer thanksgiving to all the abundance they have received for the whole season. A great ceremonial feast is now held to honor all of the ancient relations who are in the spirit world. The hunters are now released to go on their hunting expedition, and are instructed to return again at the mid-winter ceremonies to begin another new year. The great spirit creator of all life is given special thanksgiving and gratitude for the many blessings bestowed upon the earth once again. Today, the Haudenosaunee Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora continue to believe that by acknowledging all of creation through song and dance, the environment will be protected.

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