



Are we the custodians of our environment? Must we defend it? Or just celebrate it? Do we share joint responsibility with God for it? For who's benefit? Has environmentalism become a creed in itself?

The leaders of the world's major faiths might envy the growing appeal of environmentalism and the commitment shown to it, especially among the young. Is this commitment compatible with and supported by the different faiths? How do we reconcile our green beliefs with our religions?

Each major faith has clear teachings about caring for creation. It can be expressed as stewardship (Islam and Judaism), as defending (Sikhism), as celebration (Hinduism) or as taking joint responsibility with God (Christianity).

Christianity

Speaking for the Catholic Church in 1990, the Pope said, 'Christians realise their responsibility within creation. Their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.'

The Protestant churches committed themselves to 'conserve and work for the integrity of creation both for its inherent value to God and in order that justice may be achieved and sustained.'

For the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate teaches that humanity ought to perceive the natural order as a sign and sacrament of God and that to respect nature is to recognise that all creatures and objects have a unique place in God's creation. The Orthodox Church teaches that it is the destiny of humanity to restore the proper relationship between God and the world as it was in Eden.

The challenge to all Christians is to discover anew the truth that God's love is for all creation, not just humanity, and to seek new ways of living that restore balance and hope of life to the endangered planet.

Islam

Muslims believe Allah created humans to be guardians of His creation. In other words, nature does not belong to us to do with as we wish, but is entrusted by Allah to our safe-keeping. 'The world is green and beautiful and Allah has appointed you his guardian over it,' taught the prophet Muhammad.

The central concept of Islam is tawheed, or unity. Allah is unity, and His unity is reflected in the unity of humanity and nature.

We must therefore maintain the integrity of the Earth, its flora and fauna, its wildlife and environment. Our responsibility is to keep balance and harmony in Allah's creation. All these principals have been translated into practical directions for how to live, embodied in the Shariah, the laws of Islam. For example, Shariah law protects animals from cruelty, conserves forests, and limits the growth of cities.



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Judaism

The Jewish attitude to nature is based on the belief that the universe is the work of the Creator. Love of God includes love of all His creations: the inanimate, plants, animals and humans. Nature in all its beauty is created for us, and our connection to nature restores us to our original state of happiness and joy. The Bible informs us that the earth is given to man 'to use and protect'. Man is granted 'dominion' over the environment but this is not the dominion

Buddhism

All nature is connected. Buddhism teaches that the idea of separateness is an illusion. The health of the whole is inseparably linked to the health of the parts and the health of the parts is inseparably linked to the health of the whole. This means that caring for the environment begins with caring for oneself.

Buddhist practice makes one feel one's existence is no more important than anyone else's. If one treats nature as a friend and teacher, one can be in harmony with other creatures and appreciate the interconnectedness of all that lives. Buddha taught people to live simply and appreciate the natural cycle of life. Craving and greed only bring unhappiness, since demands for material possessions can never be satisfied and people will always demand more, so threatening the environment. This is why the real solution to the environmental crisis begins with the individual.

Hinduism

All living beings are sacred because they are parts of God, and should be treated with respect and compassion. This is because the soul can be reincarnated into any form of life. Hinduism stresses that true happiness comes from within not from outer possessions. This means that the search for material possessions – and the consumption of materials and energy it brings – should not be allowed to dominate life. The main purpose of life is to discover the spiritual nature and the peace and fulfilment it brings. The effort to exploit the things of this world is considered by Hindu teachers to be a distraction from this central purpose of life.

Want to learn more? Want to get involved?

Are you interested in learning more about what our different faiths say about the environment and about other important issues? Would you like join others from all faith backgrounds and make a positive contribution to the environment? If so, please contact us:

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