The Essential Role of Religion in Fostering a Sustainable World

by Peter Adriance

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The Essential Role of Religion in Fostering a Sustainable World

- Spiritual Foundations
- Faith in Action
- Science and Religion – Symbiosis
- The Bahá’í Community - vision and approach
Faithful Environmental Stewardship

Rooted in the Sacred...
...God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear...
...Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind... and God saw that it was good.

(Genesis)
"O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Therefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life."

(Bahá’í Writings)
The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.  
(Psalm 24)
Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge...

...a sign of His sovereignty, a revelation of His names, a symbol of His majesty....

(Bahá'í Writings)
I am the fresh taste of the water...
...the silver of the moon...
...I am the fire's red light...
...The vital air moving in all which moves

(Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter vii)
It is He Who sends down rain from the sky...He has made subject to you the Night and the Day...

And the things on this earth which He has multiplied in varying colors...
...It is He Who has made the sea...
And He has set up on the earth mountains standing firm...
and rivers and roads;
that ye may guide yourselves...
...and that ye may go in quest of his bounties...
...and that ye might give thanks.
(Quran, Surah 16)
Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin... This diversity of type is apparent throughout the whole of nature. (Bahá'í Writings)
But ask... the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.

(Job 12:7-8)
...the universe is a scroll that
discloseth His hidden secrets.
(Bahá'í Writings)
“See my handiwork, my creation, how beautiful and balanced it is.

Be careful not to ruin or destroy it, for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you.”

Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13 (Judaism)
O ye friends of God!

... exercise the utmost kindness towards every living creature...

(Bahá'í Writings)
One should cultivate an unlimited loving mind toward all beings the way a mother protects her only child with her life.

One should cultivate an unlimited loving mind without obstruction, anger or opposition to the whole world -- above, below, across.

(Metta Sutta 1. -- Theravada Buddhism)
Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men.

(Bahá'í Writings)
O sons of Adam... Eat and drink, but do not be wasteful.

(7:31 Al-Qur'an -- Islam)
Listen!
How can one buy or sell the air?
The warmth of the land?
Man is a stranger coming to the land.
His hunger will eat the earth bare
and leave only a desert.

(Chief Seattle)
If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.

(Bahá’í Writings)
I do not think the measure of a civilization is how tall its buildings of concrete are, but rather how well its people have learned to relate to their environment and fellow man.

(Sun Bear of the Chippewa Tribe)
...cooperation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in...the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness. (Bahá'í Writings)
Treat the earth well.
It was not given to you by your parents,
It was loaned to you by your children.

~ American Indian Proverb ~
The oneness of humanity is the fundamental spiritual and social truth shaping our age.

(Bahá’í International Community)
The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established...
...This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded.

(Bahá’í Writings)
Imbued with the same virtues as man, rising through all the degrees of human attainment, women will become the peers of men, and until this equality is established, true progress and attainment for the human race will not be facilitated.

(Bahá’í Writings)
Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.

(Chief Seattle, 1854)
“Only a comprehensive vision of a global society, supported by universal values and principles, can inspire individuals to take responsibility for the long-term care and protection of the natural environment. Bahá’ís find such a world embracing vision and system of values in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh – teachings which herald an era of planetary justice, prosperity and unity.”

(Bahá’í International Community)
For Baha'is, Baha'u'llah's promise that civilization will exist on this planet for a minimum of five thousand centuries makes it unconscionable to ignore the long-term impact of decisions made today. The world community must, therefore, learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability into the distant reaches of time.

(Bahá’í International Community)
The Earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

(Bahá’í Writings)
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“The changes required to reorient the world toward a sustainable future imply degrees of sacrifice, social integration, selfless action, and unity of purpose rarely achieved in human history. These qualities have reached their highest degree of development through the power of religion...”

(Bahá’í International Community, Earth Charter, 1991)
“...the world's religious communities have a major role to play in inspiring these qualities in their members, releasing latent capacities of the human spirit and empowering individuals to act on behalf of the planet, its peoples, and future generations.”

(Bahá’í International Community, *Earth Charter*, 1991)
• Invoking the Spirit - Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World (2002)

• State of the World 2003, Ch. 8

• Inspiring Progress: Religion’s Contributions to Sustainable Development (2006)

Gary Gardner, Worldwatch Institute
Religious “Assets” for Building a Sustainable World

• Capacity to Shape Worldviews
• Moral Authority
• Sheer numbers of Adherents
• Significant Material Resources
• Community-Building Capacity

(Gardner, 2002)
The Story of Tony Deamer, Vanuatu

• Entrepreneur/ Businessman

• Creator of “Island Fuel” (no plans for patent)

• Employs as many women as men (including mechanics)

Deamer (Bahá’í): inspired by his Faith

(Gardner, Inspiring Progress, 2006)
Deamer’s “life story embodies both a challenge and a hope for human advancement in the 21st century...”

**THE CHALLENGE:** “to redefine progress -- to revamp economies to work in harmony with the natural environment and serve all people.”

**THE HOPE:** “that religious leaders and communities will recognize the powerful contribution they can make and lend their considerable influence to it.”

Deamer (Bahá’í): inspired by his Faith

(Gardner, Inspiring Progress 2006)
2007 Yale Conference Report
“Toward a New Consciousness: Values to Sustain Human and Natural communities”

“The changes needed to sustain human and natural communities can only be achieved in the context of the rise of a new consciousness...a spiritual awakening...a transformation of the human heart...”
“Religions played key roles in ending slavery, in the civil rights movement, and in overcoming apartheid in South Africa, and they are now turning attention with increasing strength to the environment.” - Gus Speth, 2007
“No other group of institutions can wield the particular moral authority of the religions”

Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder Forum on Religion and Ecology
2008: Sierra Club’s first ever national report on environmental engagement of faith communities

Examples from 50 states
“We recognize that lasting social change rarely takes place without the active engagement of communities of faith.”

“For... two decades, religious leaders...[have been] linking core religious values such as stewardship, justice, and concern for future generations with environmental concerns”
Interfaith Power and Light & The Renewal Project

Rev. Sally G. Bingham
Green Sanctuary Program
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Unitarian Universalist Ministry for the Earth
(2007)
“these environmental crises may be the greatest moral challenge facing humankind in the 21st century... religions may be the only human institutions still able to respond to the challenge... A different level of awareness—a spiritual awareness—is critical.”

Green Sanctuary Program
Unitarian Universalist
"How Many Jews Does It Take to Change a Light Bulb?"

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

“A Light Among the Nations” campaign

“Take a Scientist to Synagogue” speaker’s bureau
“Faith Sector” and Other Resources for Sustainability Education

UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
ARC/UNDP seven year plans for generational change

Environmental action plans by organizations and traditions within the world’s faiths to be launched in late 2009.
The International Environment Forum

www.bcca.org/ief

A Bahá’í-inspired forum for knowledge-sharing, education and information exchange
Faith in Action, more...

- National Religious Partnership for the Environment
- EnergyStar for Congregations – U.S. EPA
- FCNL Headquarters – Washington, DC
- Vineyard Christian Fellowship - Boise
- Faith in Place – Chicago
- Faith and the Common Good
- GreenFaith
- Etc...
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"Science and Religion should go forward together; indeed, they should be like two fingers of one hand."

(Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 71)
“Thirty years ago, I thought that with enough good science we would be able to solve the environmental crisis. I was wrong. I used to think that the greatest problems threatening the planet were pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change. I was wrong there too...

Gus Speth, Dean, Yale School of Forestry and the Environment at a 2008 meeting between scientists and evangelical leaders
“... I now believe that the greatest problems are pride, apathy and greed. Because that’s what’s keeping us from solving the environmental problem. For that, I now see that we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we in the scientific community don’t know how to do that. But you [in the faith community] do. We need your help.”

Gus Speth, Dean, Yale School of Forestry and the Environment at a 2008 meeting between scientists and evangelical leaders
"Science and religion are two of the most potent forces on Earth, and they should come together to save the creation."

E.O. Wilson, Naturalist
"We left changed people, more convinced than ever that scientists and Evangelicals had to speak with one voice and do everything in their power to save this indescribably beautiful and precious gift we have all been given."

Scientist, Eric Chivian & Evangelical Leader, Richard Cizik

Convener 30 scientists and evangelical leaders in 2005
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“The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude.”
(Ridvan 153, 1996)
“What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted.”

(Ridvan 153, 1996)
“This Plan...is set at one of the most critical times in the life of the planet. It is meant to prepare our community to cope with the accelerating changes... occurring in the world...”

(Ridvan 153, 1996)
“...and to place the community in a position both to withstand the weight of the accompanying tests and challenges and to make more visible a pattern of functioning to which the world can turn for aid and example in the wake of a tumultuous transition.”

(Ridvan 153, 1996)
“The world's crying need for the divine prescriptions is made plain by the ills afflicting society at every level in all parts of the planet. We must be swift in ministering to this need.”

(2001 Jan 14)
The Universal House of Justice

Humanity's crying need will not be met by a struggle among competing ambitions or by protest... of the countless wrongs afflicting a desperate age. It calls, rather, for a fundamental change of consciousness... that the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.

(2001 May 24)