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UNESCO Chair on Education  
for Sustainable Development  
and the Earth Charter



Earth  
Charter  
International



# Exploring Synergies between Faith Values and Education for Sustainable Development



Japan  
Funds-in-Trust

This publication provides a space for the voices of different religions and faith traditions to be shared and linked with the efforts of Education for Sustainable Development. In this book, the points of convergence between ESD and faith values are examined, with emphasis on potential synergies between them. This effort recognizes the valuable role faith traditions play in creating a sustainable world, and in making a substantial contribution to the efforts of the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development.

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The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of the facts contained in this document and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO, the University for Peace, nor the Earth Charter International, and do not commit the Organizations.

## Exploring Synergies between Faith Values and Education for Sustainable Development

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**Editors:** Richard Clugston and Steve Holt

**Project Coordinators:** Mirian Vilela and Alicia Jimenez

**Layout and Cover:** Adriana Molina

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Earth Charter International and  
Earth Charter Center for Education for Sustainable  
Development at UPEACE  
C/O University for Peace  
P.O. Box 138 - 6100  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
<http://www.earthcharter.org>

University for Peace  
P.O. Box 138 - 6100  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
<http://www.upeace.org>



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## World Religions, the Earth Charter, and Sustainability

Mary Evelyn Tucker

Mary Evelyn Tucker (United States) is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University where she has appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. She teaches in the joint MA programme in religion and ecology and directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim. Tucker is a member of the Earth Charter International Council.

The human community is still struggling to reinvent the idea of “sustainable development”. It is becoming clear that a broader definition is needed for more effective practice – one that integrates efforts at poverty alleviation with environmental protection. Many religious communities have been involved in efforts to mitigate poverty, hunger, and disease, but now they are recognizing this cannot be done adequately without attention to the environment, which is deteriorating rapidly. Sufficiency of food, shelter, and health for humans will depend on a thriving biosphere to support life for the Earth community.

The litany of environmental and development problems is well known, but what is becoming ever more self-evident is that they cannot be solved by science, technology, law, politics, or economics alone. That is because we are more aware that environmental and development issues are, in large measure, social issues. Thus “fixing” the environment through technology or regulating development through legislation will not be sufficient. These are necessary approaches, but more is needed. We are being pressed to see the linkage between environment and people, between healthy ecosystems and healthy social systems, between environmental protection and poverty alleviation. The challenge, then, is to create whole communities, where humans are not dominating nature, but rather recognize their profound dependence on the larger community of life. In this spirit, economic growth needs

to be redefined and a broader ethical perspective needs to be articulated so as to integrate ecology and economy. Neo-classical economic thinking has equated economic growth with progress, despite any harm to the environment. In short, new indicators of “progress” need to be developed. The world’s religions and the Earth Charter can play a role in this redefinition with an ethical articulation of a path toward a flourishing Earth community.

In terms of general principles and values that the world religions offer to sustainability discussions, they can be described as broadening the category of sustainable development to include past, present, and future concerns. In short, large-scale and long-term perspectives will be needed to envision sustainable ecosystems that have developed over billions of years, sustainable living for humans at present, and a sustainable future for all life. These correspond to the central concerns of the Earth Charter and the growing commitments of the world’s religions to ecology, justice, and peace. They correspond to six key “values for human-Earth flourishing” shared by the world religions as they are being challenged to envision a viable future for the Earth community. These values include: reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility, and renewal.

These values for human-Earth flourishing were first identified as the result of a three-year conference series at Harvard on World Religions and Ecology



from 1996-1998 (Daedalus "Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?" Fall 2001). A major international website was created to assist research, education, and outreach in this area. The website provides introductions to the world religions and their ecological dimensions along with annotated bibliographies of the books and articles in English on this topic. It also identifies over a hundred engaged projects of religious grassroots environmentalism. It contains a lengthy bibliography on religion and poverty issues. It includes educational materials such as syllabi, videos, CDs and DVDs ([www.yale.edu/religionandecology](http://www.yale.edu/religionandecology)).

Within the religions, statements on the environment or on eco-justice have been released by the major world religions and indigenous traditions. Leaders such as the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Pope, and the Dalai Lama have spoken out regarding the urgency of these issues. Most religions observe that moral authority has played an important role in many transformations of values and behavior, such as the abolition of slavery in 19th century England and in civil rights by Martin Luther King and other religious leaders in the United States and South Africa in the 20th century.

There is a growing recognition that cultural and religious values have a significant role to play in helping to shape a sustainable future. While religions have their problematic dimensions, including intolerance, dogmatism, and fundamentalism, they also have served as wellsprings of wisdom, as sources of moral inspiration, and as containers of transforming ritual practices. Thus they tend to be both conservators of continuity and agents of change. Religions have always played this role of conserving and transforming, balancing the dynamic tension of continuity and change for cultures over long spans of time. Indeed, human cultures are profoundly shaped by this dialectic and civilizations endure by navigating the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. Moving too deeply into traditional ways leads to fossilization and fundamentalism, while going

too far into modernity can lead to superficial and inadequate responses to change.

It is thus at a moment of immense significance for the future of life on the planet that the world's religions may be of assistance as they move into their ecological phase. The common set of values for human-Earth flourishing identified from the Harvard conference series on World Religions and Ecology can be seen as compatible with the ethical principles of the Earth Charter. Recognizing the complementary nature of these two may be a helpful framework for linking religion, ethics, and sustainability. This provides an integrating ethical context for the Millennium Development Goals.

The Earth Charter is both a document and a movement. It draws on scientific knowledge, legal principles, sustainability practices, ecological economics, the precautionary principle, and equity issues.

The Charter offers a comprehensive framework for revisioning sustainability as balancing the needs for economic development with environmental protection. It presents an integrated set of principles to guide our emerging planetary civilization that is multinational, multicultural, and multi-religious. It provides a platform for universal commitment to the flourishing of bio-social planetary life systems along with differentiated responsibilities.

The key components of the Earth Charter are: 1) cosmological context, 2) ecological integrity, 3) social equity, 4) economic justice, 5) democracy, 6) non-violence and peace. These six components of a sustainable future have their counterparts in the values for human-Earth flourishing that are shared among the world's religions as identified in the Harvard conference series. A planetary future that is "flourishing," not simply "sustainable," will be enhanced by the six components identified by the Earth Charter along with the six values of the world religions. Such a framework that integrates values for flourishing of the world's religions with the cen-

tral component of global ethics may be an important context for expanding sustainability principles and practices.

This integration of these principles provides a unique synergy for rethinking sustainability. Such a synergy can contribute to the broadened understanding of sustainable development as including economic, ecological, social, and spiritual well-being. This broadened understanding may be a basis for long-term policies, programmes, and practices for a planetary future that is not only ethically sustainable, but also sustaining for human energies. For at present we face a crisis of hope that we can make a transition to a viable future for the Earth community. The capacity of the world's religions to provide moral direction and inspiration for a flourishing community of life is significant. The potential of the Earth Charter to create an ethical framework for sustainable development plans and practices is considerable. Together they may provide a comprehensive grounding for creating a common future.



# Faith Traditions and Sustainable Development

Rick Clugston

Rick Clugston (United States) is Project Coordinator for the Earth Charter Scholarship Project at the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education at Florida Gulf Coast University. Dr. Clugston serves on the Earth Charter International Council.

Most people identify themselves as religious and/or spiritual, and for many, their faiths call them to live in ways that respect and care for all life, present and future, and to focus on being more, not having more, after basic needs are met. In the context of the ongoing global dialogues on sustainable development and education for sustainable development, religious and spiritual communities can play a critical role in advancing a strong framework for sustainable development that includes the spiritual dimension of life, and that contributes examples of educating for sustainable living.

UNESCO recognizes that faith communities have much to contribute to our understanding of sustainable development, and have been educating for sustainable living for many years, often centuries, before the concepts of sustainable development (SD) and education for sustainable development (ESD) were invented in our modern, globalized era.

Representatives of a diversity of faith traditions were invited to contribute to this publication. They were asked to respond to the following questions:

- *What are the linkages you see between your faith tradition and the concept and purpose of sustainable development? What are the most important values in your faith that connect to sustainability?*
- *How does your faith teach and communicate the vision of sustainable development? How can*

*Education for Sustainable Development and the Earth Charter be part of those processes?*

- *How do you see your faith tradition contributing to the transition to a sustainable world?*
- *What tools can your faith contribute to ESD? What tools from ESD can contribute to your faith?*

UNESCO is responsible for coordinating the United Nation's efforts to shape education for sustainable development, and serves as the Secretariat of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). Their background material on ESD observes that "Education for sustainable development (ESD) is a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources. ESD applies transdisciplinary educational methods and approaches to develop an ethic for lifelong learning; fosters respect for human needs that are compatible with sustainable use of natural resources and the needs of the planet; and nurtures a sense of global solidarity. ESD integrates concepts and analytical tools from a variety of disciplines to help people better understand the world in which they live." (UNESCO, 2010, "ESD in Brief.")

In her preface Mary Evelyn Tucker, points to the challenges and opportunities for religious traditions to bring their core values into our debates over sustainable development, emphasizing the common religious values of "reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility, and renewal".

This introductory article is organized in the following sections:

1. faith perspectives on sustainable development;
2. examples of ESD from faith communities, including the uses of the Earth Charter; and
3. engaging effectively in bringing the spiritual dimension of sustainability into sustainable development policy and practice and into ESD

## Faith perspectives on sustainable development

You will find here 17 articles from Indigenous Traditions, Abrahamic and Asian Religious Traditions. The authors of these articles describe the major tenets of their faiths which support sustainable development. They express similar understandings of the purpose of development and its core principles, such as the golden rule. They call us to recognize the integrity of creation/the interconnectedness of all and to respect and care for the community of life and future generations.

The following quotes illustrate these common values:

From his African Christian perspective, Yakubu notes that "Sustainable development is holistic, it encompasses four dimensions: social, economic, ecological and political. The nexus and inter-linkages between these four elements can be rendered intelligible in the context of the biblical idea of interdependence and the relationship between the body and its parts, which Apostle Paul described in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Verse 26 (NIV) says, 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.' "

Toh describes basic premises of Buddhism, including "'dependent origination' which sees all things and phenomena as interdependent and arising from multiple causes and conditions is clearly consistent with the 'sustainable development' view of the 'environment' (including humanity) as comprising

interdependent dimensions and elements that interact mutually and are embedded in complex relationships of causes and effects. Recognizing this Buddhists feel and enact a deep sense of compassion and loving-kindness towards all other beings and parts of the universe. This empathy... motivates engaged Buddhists to act in ways that help alleviate or overcome the suffering, especially via actions designed to address the root causes of the ecological crisis."

Zabariah Haji Matali points out "There are numerous citations from the Holy Quran and the hadiths (sayings of the Prophet pbuh) on sustainability and the wise utilisation of natural resources. They all lead to the conviction that all elements, species, habitats and ecosystems are part of the perfect universe created by the Al-Mighty. Hence respecting the law of nature and all its components is an obligation of every Muslim, who by definition has 'surrendered' or 'submitted' himself/herself, body and soul, to the Creator."

Most of the authors are quite critical of the current development paradigm, and the values driving globalization. They emphasize that spiritually the materialistic and consumption oriented person both served and created by economic globalization- is a stunted and misdirected person, creating tragic social and environmental consequences by pursuing this false path to the good life. They stress the need for humility, awe and wonder, and responsiveness to a deeper dimension of existence that has created and sustains all that is, to quieting our desires and fears, to seeking to be more, not have more (wealth, power, control), and to living in a way that all can live.

Bishop Browning draws our attention to the "Christian belief that creation has set within it rhythms and cycles that cannot be abrogated by humanity without consequence. That we have endeavoured to replace such a cycle with our own is at the heart of our problem. Our cycle, colloquially

called '24/7', is essentially a cycle of productivity. Its driving force has become the fear of scarcity. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is our measure of the rhythm's success. The irony is that we produce to increase our wellbeing, but increasingly the means (productivity) is making the goal (wellbeing) more elusive. The Christian values of harmony, wholeness, justice, wellbeing are all interconnected and relate back to the cycle we believe is set within creation and which we have abrogated to our peril.

Toh comments, that in Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths emphasize the necessity to overcome attachments or cravings, such as greed, ill-will and delusion, which if not transcended, fuel a continuing cycle of "suffering". This insight is most relevant to the problem of an unsustainable paradigm of "development" and "progress" reflected in the dominant over-consumerist and over-materialist economic, social and cultural order.

Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism have intermingled for centuries in China and each has influenced on the others. The three philosophies commonly emphasize respect for others, social harmony, and interconnectedness with nature and the earth, which are all in line with the concept and purpose of sustainable development. Another fundamental concept is that of the collective effort, rather than emphasis on the individual, which adds strength to the sustainable development call for global responsibility and global action. All three philosophies emphasize the importance of frugality and refraining from greed; i.e. 'being more instead of having more', which is also essential for sustainability. (Yunhua Liu and Alicia Constable)

The failure to place economics into the broader context of humanity's social and spiritual existence has led to a corrosive materialism in the world's more economically advantaged regions, and persistent conditions of deprivation among the masses of the world's peoples.... Society must develop new

economic models... furthering a dynamic, just and thriving social order. Such economic systems will be strongly altruistic and cooperative in nature; they will provide meaningful employment and will help to eradicate poverty in the world.... The ultimate function of economic systems should be to equip the peoples and institutions of the world with the means to achieve the real purpose of development: that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness. (Arthur Dahl-Bahai)

## Examples of ESD from faith communities

Spiritual teachings from very different historical and cultural contexts emphasize that, in this world of death and suffering, ignorance, fear and desire- an individual can connect to the deeper, ultimate, radiant and caring source of all that is and live a full and enduring life. Most of these traditions offer a set of practices and ways of living that will awaken this connection and bring about justice, peace, and what we might now call sustainability in the world. The authors describe various activities related to education for sustainability, including social action campaigns, community development, and religious celebrations. Most of the examples below use the Earth Charter in their ESD efforts.

Sister Nagle describes basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching and their correlations with Earth Charter principles, describing a set of campaigns she is engaged in to practice these principles, such as stopping human trafficking and reducing the use of bottled water. Rabbi Amswych promotes a stable market economy based on a more direct relationship between producers and consumers.

Soka Gakkai International created the "Seeds of Hope: Visions of sustainability, steps toward change" exhibition which aims to provide a positive message without glossing over difficult realities. It stresses how all religions have messages relating to interconnectedness, environmental protection and sustainability, featuring quotes from different

traditions. It also stresses that sustainability is holistic, and not just about the environment. Examples of empowered individuals who have made a difference are shared, including those who have strengthened links in their communities.

The calendar of the Orthodox Church starts with a day of prayer for nature and earth, as it marks the beginning of the harvest season on the first of September every year. In the services of the church, there are prayers which ask God to grant us, our children, and our grandchildren for the continued provision of food, the protection of our climate, and a peaceful earth without war and crisis – all of which are connected to the goals of the Earth Charter. The Orthodox Church also regularly practices fasting, usually at the beginning of winter and the beginning of spring, seasons that are important in the life cycle of all creatures. This fasting is entirely vegan, eliminating all animal products, including dairy. The purpose of the tradition is to ask adherents of the faith to quit unnecessary lifestyles, and instead participate in sustainable lifestyles which both eliminate the gap between rich and poor, and strengthen the friendship between humans and nature.

Communities in Shangri-la, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, have used the Earth Charter as a framework, linking it to their own knowledge and local Buddhist beliefs to create a community development plan, which involves the creation of a Community Nature Reserve. Students and teachers participating in the Water School for a Living Yangtze in Mianyang, Sichuan have been using the traditional Daoist deep respect for water as a way to explain the importance of sustainable water resource management to local communities. (Yunhua Liu and Alicia Constable)

At present, many Christians and churches have embraced the Earth Charter principles because they see in it, in a secular way, the biblical perspective of responsibility toward Earth and social justice

that is linked to ecological justice. In many base communities the decision has been made to deepen into sustainability education which implies a frugal and supportive use of all nature's goods and services, avoiding as much as possible the use of pesticides, encouraging family organic agriculture and promoting the utilization of all residues as ways of generating energy.

## Engaging effectively in bringing the spiritual dimension of sustainability into sustainable development policy and practice and into ESD

UNESCO realizes that "Many, perhaps most, formal educational institutions, as well as many nonformal and media based educational/advertising enterprises, are not promoting ESD. Rather they are conditioning individuals to work for other ends, whether that is overconsumption or the promotion of fundamentalist and intolerant social projects."

Only a few of the authors touch on the many teachings and historical and current actions of religious and spiritual organizations that support unsustainability in all its forms. Mary Evelyn Tucker comments, "While religions have their problematic dimensions, including intolerance, dogmatism, and fundamentalism, they also have served as wellsprings of wisdom, as sources of moral inspiration, and as containers of transforming ritual practices. Thus they tend to be both conservators of continuity and agents of change."

Rabbi Soetendorp calls on us to collaborate to promote education for sustainable development "by incorporating concepts from different cultures and traditions such as Ubuntu, the 7<sup>th</sup> generation principle, the Earth Charter and the Charter for Compassion" in our various educational efforts. He is also taking the lead in a project focused on the "Spiritual Dimensions of Sustainable Development" which invites various faith communities to



contribute to advancing and deepening a global commitment to sustainable development through two major sets of activities:

Within our various traditions, we must:

1. recognize where our traditions and organizations have promoted violence, injustice and unsustainability;
2. commit to deepening our sense of empathy and interconnection with all our brothers and sisters and the whole community of life on Earth;
3. demonstrate sustainable living in our religious and spiritual communities;
4. educate ourselves to work effectively in development policy arenas, understanding the critical changes that need to happen in our economic and governance structures to create a flourishing future for all and
5. work together, serving as forces for good, by weighing in on the major international processes including Rio + 20, the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development and the realisation of the MDGs

We must also demand that our governments and international institutions:

1. affirm a framework of strong sustainability, such as the Earth Charter, as a guide to development policy and practice;
2. create a green economy that cares for future generations and genuinely internalizes social and environmental costs into the economic bottom line;
3. create structures for global governance with a global trusteeship mandate for Earth's common goods;

4. make good on commitments to MDG's, Agenda 21 and other commitments; and
5. acknowledge the importance of the spiritual dimension of sustainability-that after basic needs are met, life is about being more, not having more.

## Conclusion

Tu Weiming challenges us: "The time is ripe for us to rethink the human in the 21st century. We are in need of a comprehensive spiritual humanism that is capable of integrating the four inseparable dimensions of human flourishing: self, community, Earth, and Heaven... Those who are musical to the sound of the Earth will guide us on to a new path of survival." And Marcos Terena reminds us "Modernity cannot survive as it is formed. It will not survive without the participation of traditional indigenous knowledge. How can we contribute? Back in indigenous lands we can still hear the song from the heart of the Earth, a song that comes from indigenous people's heart. A song taught to educate about our way of life and the spiritual respect for the Great Creator."

As the Earth Charter concludes in The Way Forward, "Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life. "



## Memory and Science and Indigenous Knowledge

Marcos Terena

Marcos Terena (Brazil) was the Coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples World Conference at Rio-92. He is a Terena native from Brazil. He is a Writer, Communicator and Indigenous Articulator, a member of the Indigenous Itinerant Cathedra and of the Intertribal Committee - Indigenous

For centuries, almost as invisible as the sound of the wind, the indigenous voice was silent to the ears of the colonizer. Even today, it still travels from person to person orally and simply, only visible to those who have a gift: the gift of listening.

Throughout every continent, river, forest and vegetation there was a sacred and material knowledge. A knowledge within an ecosystem or traditional habitat. A knowledge that would hold a life system beyond belief: the balance between culture and spirituality - the land of indigenous peoples. And what represented for so many years the line of equilibrium and connection between the ancestors and the future? Only one bridge: the word.

In these new times it is important to remember that in each of the colonization processes the voice from the indigenous people and their life system has never been considered as part of the construction of a new world.

Many people disappeared and died either physically or culturally in order to generate today's world. This has created an historical and moral debt that still exists, and a true indigenous holocaust that cannot be paid with coins.

Now that five centuries have passed within a new millennium, the indigenous voice which comes out

of the mountains, rivers, with the wind, is born again and is looking for a different kind of relationship with the new times. The dignified right to live.

Modernity recognizes at all levels that in order to generate quality of life the indigenous voice and their traditional knowledge are important. It recognizes that their teachings are essential to build a new development model. A kind of development where the mountains, the water and nature are not considered as a commodity currency but a source of balance before the huge and severe social, economic and environmental crisis of the Earth.

While several sectors of modern society itself and its institutions are creating affirmative forms of alliances of respect between the indigenous parties and the non-indigenous interests, the economic ambition that survives continues with the poor and rich concept and looks at the indigenous land as a source of natural resources and minerals that they need to better exploit.

The challenge of modernity is how to listen and practice the indigenous traditional and spiritual teachings within a complex network of technologies and religions. The challenge of the indigenous peoples that are still alive is how to teach modernity. Because for the indigenous peoples that have or have kept their sacred territories, the water, biodiversity, culture and physical strength is related



to the depth of Earth's Great Spirit. It is impossible for a native to have physical strength or material resources without considering spiritual strength.

Indigenous Spirituality is not a religious or institutional concept but the capacity to live and celebrate life with the strength of the Great Spirit. For centuries traditional indigenous peoples would not make petitions to the Creator. Traditional education taught only to express gratitude.

Because the indigenous society had everything in its hands to attain quality of life and live well, everything came from the Earth such as health, spirituality, family, kids, women, elders and the animals, birds, everything. Then, why ask for more?

The invisible native from yesterday looks at modernity with concern.

What kind of world are we preparing for the future? What kind of development do we want to guarantee to our children and grandchildren?

The indigenous community has made a commitment to Mother Earth: keep maintaining the rights of all, sharing in the development of a new world that respects life on Earth. This teaching comes from an oral tradition, from women, and from children's education.

Is there time? Yes there is.  
But are they going to listen?

Therefore we think that the best solution is a new development education system, but development with sustainability and indigenous spirituality. How to stop new epidemics that are born from the research at the laboratories? How to justify the existence of men, women and children who do not have anything to eat? It is proven that development cannot be only economic. It has to be sustainable and capable of generating quality of life.

## Indigenous Knowledge: a Bridge between Tradition and Modernity

If we take traditional indigenous education as a foundation, what happens with life and nature in modernity, indigenous peoples have to keep the commitment of promoting this almost impossible encounter: Tradition and Modernity.

At the indigenous community which lives and always lived in its original land, teaching begins when a child is born. This model of traditional education begins with a Woman, a mother who sings a song for her child, a song that talks about childhood, birds, small animals, rivers and the Creator. A song that is sang in the native language. Then you learn to listen, think, decide and share life.

The child who listens lives each moment. The child wakes up, goes to sleep, and is respected in his/her time of childhood. Learns in order to be strong and practice respect for Mother Earth, the Creator as well as for people and his people. It is the consciousness of life and humanity. The child learns to develop his/her leadership or community membership role. It is the time when he prepares to start his free determination as child, youngster, man or woman, chief or spiritual leader. Then he also has the commitment to transmit to his child, to the next generation, the sacred right to live as a dignified and sovereign people. People with knowledge, education, courage, health and spiritual strength. It is the main exercise of a people: cultural and spiritual strength, human sovereignty.

Across the great river where there are educational systems organized in a different technological and scientific way, there are many youngsters studying out of fear. Fear of not obtaining good grades on the tests. Fear of the family, fathers, mothers, teachers and even of their own society.

This is when the educational system promotes an evaluation level to have the student promoted, encouraging distinction and discrimination as if they were achievements.

The indigenous educational system is different because it is traditional, rich, productive, and sustainable and shared by the family, in society and from generation to generation.

The Western educational system is rich, selective, promoting in children and youth the spirit of the person, particular, exclusive, productive but not shared, that always generates discrimination because of the lack of opportunities between one or the other.

For formal and Western education everything ends when studies end. For indigenous education everything ends when life ends.

That is, if we wish to build a better future, how do we prepare our children, youth and society?

## Indigenous Rights, Sustainability and the Future

Indigenous elders who tried to share ancestral, cultural, environmental and spiritual knowledge with the arriving colonizing society were deceived and treated as poor, sinful and persons with no perspective towards the future.

Leaders with spiritual vision decided, as a matter of survival of their community and from the heart of Mother Earth, to listen and learn about the life of the colonizer. They decided to enter into the linguistic, educational and cultural concepts of modernity knowing the great risk for their own survival.

Considering that in many indigenous communities development of modernity came with the physical and economic strength as well as political and cultural domination, we discovered that in reality

the process was only looking for the resources of the new land without respect or any consideration toward the human spirit of natives.

For each advance, for each act of destruction of nature, there was a political and legal justification. The construction of a hydroelectric plant, a waterway, mining activity or a new city, the economic power was justified treating us as disabled people toward development. Parallel to this, before the social and environmental destruction, legal norms as well as human and environmental compensation programmes were created.

Indigenous leaders perceive that they must find a path based on their spiritual tradition for a new treaty with the colonizer using the non-indigenous educational, political and legal codes but for the indigenous people and their land rights. They notice that the colonizer is near their region but also in distant places, that is, at national and international levels.

On one hand, it is important to know and learn with the occidental educational system. It is important to train young lawyers and anthropologists, and to have political representation, but the most important thing is to look urgently for a way of educating the colonizer's system.

It is worthless to only guarantee the indigenous rights if we do not promote a new concept of human, scientific and environmental protection education. As a result of the indigenous struggle, after twenty years the Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights was born at the United Nations, from which we highlight the following:

### Article 31

"The indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural patrimony, their traditional knowledge, their traditional cultural expressions and the manifestation of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, the seeds, the medicines, the knowledge about the flora and fauna, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games, as well as virtual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property of said cultural patrimony, their traditional knowledge and their traditional cultural expressions.

The States will adopt effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights together with the indigenous peoples."

During the Rio-92 Summit the Indigenous Peoples of all continents of Mother Earth met to talk about and write more than 109 recommendations based on the Kari-Oca Declaration, as it was called: *"We the Indigenous Peoples look at the future in the footprints of our ancestors."*

What can we say when Mother Earth warns us with the wind, the water and the sun that it is time to stop destruction?

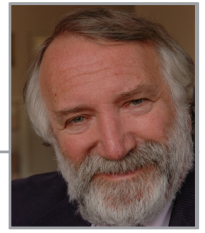
We the indigenous peoples believe that if we want a better future it is important to know where the best is. Transgenic technology? Business agriculture that do not feeds us? Seeds made in laboratories? An education that does not generate sustainable development? An education that does not know how to listen to the voice of the wind and share with the balance?

We the indigenous peoples cannot yet disesteem the capacity of technology and modern education but we affirm: That said modernity cannot survive as it is formed. That it will not survive without the participation of traditional indigenous knowledge.

How can we contribute? Back in indigenous lands we can still hear the song from the heart of the Earth. A song that comes from the heart of the indigenous people. A song taught to educate about our way of life and the spiritual respect for the Great Creator.

We the indigenous peoples are still listening and singing with new generations, because we believe that someday, that will certainly come, we will share with black, white and yellow children.

We trust that the voice of the future is the voice of the children that cry and sing. A childhood that is not poor or rich and has no color, because it is the spirit of nature that wants to live for the well being of all of us.



# "We Are One Human Body"

## Global Empathy As A Central Value for Education for Sustainable Development

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp (Netherlands) is the President and Founder of the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values. He is also the Rabbi Emeritus of the liberal Jewish congregation of Beth Jehuda in The Hague and former President of the European Region of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. He is a founding member of Green Cross International, the Islam-West dialogue group of the World Economic Forum. He serves as an Earth Charter Commissioner and a Millennium Development Ambassador.

I am writing this text as the world is being shocked by the tragedies of the famine in the Horn of Africa and the horrible attacks in Oslo where at least 76 people, most of them teenagers, were killed by a right-wing extremist who justified his bloody deeds with his disdain for multiculturalism and an alleged "islamization" of European societies.

On July 22, United Nation's secretary general Ban Ki-moon made an impassionate plea to help the famine-hit people in Somalia:

"Across the Horn of Africa, people are starving. A catastrophic combination of conflict, high food prices and drought has left more than 11 million people in desperate need. From within Somalia, we hear terrible stories of families who watched their children die, one by one. As a human family, these stories shock us. We ask: How is this happening again? After all, the world has enough food. And yes, economic times are hard. Yet since time immemorial, amid even the worst austerity, the compassionate impulse to help our fellow human beings has never wavered."<sup>1</sup>

In the few months between this momentous wake up call and the end of the printing of this book the fate of these fellow human beings, our neighbours around the corner of our street in the global village will have been sealed. I can just hope and act and pray that we will have risen to the occasion and have found the means for immediate relief - for the sake of every woman, child and man who are holding to life but also for the sake of ourselves whom fate has kept on the safe side of food security but whose credibility as bearers of the image of Gd is again at stake.

When we lose hope in our own capability to change their fate, those who miraculously will have survived will be doomed the next time the monstrous combination of drought, lawlessness and the callousness of nations and their citizens will befall them. And ultimately when they are lost we all are lost.

Thus it is for all our sakes that we are called to rescue our universal dream of being created in the image of Gd with the task and ability to restore the world to its original meaning of peace, of wholeness. In the words of one of the central prayers of the Jewish liturgy *letaken olam be malchut shaddai* - "To heal the world under Gds kingdom".

1. <http://www.un.org/news/>

The secretary of the United Nations puts the finger on our sorest spot. As a human family, these stories shock us. Do they? Or have we become of stone, firm and safe and distant?

Survivors of the gun attack on Utoeya Island near Oslo reported that the assassin acted in cold blood and seemed somewhat detached from the atrocities he committed. What went wrong in his life that deprived himself from all humaneness, mercy and compassion?

And what prevents us at this juncture in time when the resources of technological innovation seem to be boundless to truly emerge as one caring family?

There is one at first sight mysterious chapter in the bible that may elucidate paradox, the building of the tower of Babel. After the flood that has destroyed almost the entire human family and Earth community, the rescued descendants of Noah seem to have come to their senses. As the text of chapter 11 states the whole world possessed one language and one common purpose. And what did they do, they built a tower whose head would reach the heavens. Gd did not approve and confused them with many different languages and scattered them over the face of the earth.

## What had gone wrong?

The midrash, the Jewish commentary tells the tale: During the building process it became more and more apparent that human life was dispensable but when a stone, diligently fashioned as to fit exactly, slipped out of the hands of those who climbed the immense ladders, it was considered a tragedy.

Now the stone had to be replaced from down under causing a long delay. However when a human being had fallen to his death, it did not create a problem, the other following him would replace him immediately. A society in which stones are more important than humans has no future.

The Earth Charter calls all of us at this critical moment of Earth history to come to our senses

and recognize that "in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. "

We have to move beyond tolerance to respect and from respect to love which expresses itself in the deep understanding that we need the other to complement and enrich our own identities. This understanding is expressed in one of the parables in Jewish tradition that is paralleled in other spiritual traditions: Humans form one body. When one part of the body aches other parts of the body feel the pain. When this sense is lost it is an indication of a fatal disease that will eventually ravish the whole body.

Education for sustainable development should help learners at all ages to build the capacity to empathize with the whole human family in such a way. In the Netherlands, we have launched the Day of Respect that is celebrated in more than 3.000 primary schools, with the exact purpose of enabling children to celebrate their cultural diversity and stimulating a sense of compassion and universal bonding.

The Day of Respect engages students in a year-long programme that culminates in a day of action where well-known personalities from the worlds of music, film and sports visit the participating schools as guest teachers and give presentations on what respect for cultural diversity means to them. Each year, more schools are participating in the programmes and reactions have been overwhelming. We are now in the process of bringing the positive experience of the Day of Respect to other countries, with pilot projects in Scotland and possibly also the Caribbean island of Aruba. We hope that more countries will join us.

In the Sayings of the Fathers cha 5, 20 it is stated

"Every controversy that is in the name of Heaven shall in the end lead to a permanent result, but every controversy that is not in the name of HEAVEN shall not lead to a permanent result".

In the light of this age old teaching I would like to introduce in our educational structures the goal of achieving competition for the sake of Heaven. Like fire, the urge to compete is a beneficial impulse when it helps to unlock the sources of strength and creativity in oneself. It is destructive when this competitive tendency is only directed to the self with no regard for the consequences for others.

Religions need to come together and join forces with our educational institutions in helping the individual to improve her capacity to compete not by advancing one's own interest at all costs but by sharing, learning and teaching and opening to the other.

We in the different spiritual traditions come to recognize that we truly need each other to reach inner and outer peace and benefit immensely from this process. By sharing our innermost wisdom, we become the champions of synergy.

Opening up to the other does not threaten our identity; on the contrary it strengthens it. The sense of competition for the sake of heaven may well change the discourse of negotiation. The forthcoming Rio + 20 Conference in June 2012 can mark a turning point when we recognize in each others' eyes the image of Gd and do not fear anymore the hidden agenda.

The heart of the universe is not matter, it is interaction. This is what we in the North can learn from people of the global South. Bishop Tutu calls it Ubuntu – being human by living out of bonding with the other. He writes: "We say, 'A person is a person through other persons.' It is not, 'I think therefore I am.' It says rather: 'I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.' A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed."<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, the often quoted lines from the Earth Charter that, "we must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more not having more" needs to be understood in a reciprocal way - In order to walk the path from mere survival to full life we in the North need Ubuntu as much as the South needs our help in allocating the resources required to eradicate poverty and guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter and safe sanitation.

By incorporating concepts from different cultures and traditions such as Ubuntu and the competition for the sake of Heaven, schools can become compassionate institutions where one learns to celebrate diversity and relate with those who are nearby and far away. The Earth Charter and the Charter for Compassion that was put together under the visionary leadership of Karen Armstrong can be very helpful educational tools to build this capacity.

The day has come that humans who have been scattered over the face of the earth will realize that they can build the most exquisite towers in all the cities of the world provided they create at the same time the gardens of love, trust and human dignity.

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2. Tutu, Desmond (1999). No Future Without Forgiveness. P. 31.





## Beyond the Sabbatical A Contemporary Jewish Response to Sustainable Development

Neil Amswych

Rabbi Neil Amswych (United Kingdom) formed IDEA: Interfaith Dorset Education and Action, an interfaith environmental group that is now in touch with over 400 faith communities across Dorset, one of the UK's largest counties. As Principal Rabbi of Bournemouth Reform Synagogue, in 2011 he also guided the Movement for Reform Judaism to become the first movement in British Jewry to create and launch its own sustainability plan. His blog "A Bit of Bible, Baby and Biodiversity" attracts thousands of readers from around the world.

There is much that has been written on Judaism and Sustainability from a Biblical perspective, often focusing on the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years as well as the concept of an idyllic Biblical state – either that of the Garden of Eden, or that of the end of days when all shall live together in peace.

As laudable as the efforts to remind us all of a unifying vision may be, these commentaries are easy to ignore in the contemporary market-driven globalised society. Why would someone who regularly buys their fruit and vegetables from a supermarket after having had them flown all across the world be remotely interested that the ancient Israelites used to let their land lie fallow once every seven years? If our society is to develop sustainably it is either going to have to radically modify or completely abandon our current spending practices, so while remembrances of early Israelites letting the land rest for one year in every seven (Ex. 23:10-11) or visions of wolves lying down with lambs (Isaiah 11:6) may be religiously inspiring, they are not necessarily empowering in a practical sense today.

In the pages that follow, I explore some of the key elements of a different kind of vision that connects Jewish teaching with the Earth Charter – a vision based around the markets that people know as

opposed to the farming that they don't. Thousands of years of Jewish thought on this topic can never fully be encapsulated in just a few pages, though, so what follows is a light introduction only.

One key aspect of sustainability must be in the sustainable use of wealth, in particular, the market economy. In this regard, the Babylonian Talmud (Ta'anit 22a), dated around 500 C.E., provides a particularly prescient starting point for consideration:

"Some of the good things which Rav Chuna used to do: Every Shabbat eve he would send a messenger to the market who would buy up all the perishable vegetables which the gardeners had been unable to sell. These would then be thrown into the river. 'Surely he should have given them to the poor?' [it is asked]. 'No,' came the rejoinder, 'they would then get used to getting it free and would not come to buy in the future.' 'Perhaps he should feed them to the animals?' 'It seems that Rav Chuna holds that it is not permissible to feed food fit for human consumption to animals.' 'Perhaps he should not have bought them at all?' 'No – if nobody would pay them, then the gardeners would produce less in the future.'"

The initial response at Rav Chuna's actions is usually horror and Talmud clearly expects this reaction, hence it provides three differing questions and responses, all of which are clearly designed to calm our initial horror and to gently explain that the stability of the market is more important than the immediate needs of a few, a view which some might still find very challenging. Rav Chuna's society is like ours – those who eat the food are different from those who grow it, and for the rest of society to continue eating, those who produce the food need to continue to receive a fair and steady price for their goods. It would be an oversimplistic vision for us all to return to growing our own food exclusively – such visions are likely to end in mass starvations.

We therefore have a responsibility to make the food chain as sustainable as possible while maintaining its integrity. As such, our first priority is to ensure that, as with this excerpt, crops that are grown are used as much as possible for human consumption and not anything else. While Rav Chuna therefore suggests that crops that could be used for humans should not go to animals, a contemporary equivalent might easily be the growing of crops for biofuel instead of for food. Growing food crops to fill a motorised vehicle while others starve should be as perverse to us as feeding it to animals was to Rav Chuna. Moreover, Rav Chuna's vision is not one that deprives the poor, rather it has an overarching vision of turning individuals into consumers. His refusal to give the food to the poor is challenging but should be understood as part of a process of helping the poor regain financial and therefore social independence. This, too, is an important act of sustainable development – helping the poor (local or global) be able to fend for themselves and not have to suffer the indignity of having to follow the unsustainable whims of others who might grant them aid of some sort, as has happened many times in the past. Rav Chuna wants us all to be equal – he wants us all to be able to participate in the market, to buy our own food, to be able to fend for ourselves.

It is extremely important to note that his refusal to dump perishable food needs to be read in tandem with the Jewish responsibility to give to tzedakah, a term that is usually translated as 'charity' but which carries the connotation of 'justice,' a particularly relevant term since sustainability must be rooted in justice. Read out of context, Rav Chuna seems cruel but in context it is easily understood that during the rest of the week, Rav Chuna would have been giving the traditionally required 10% of his income to the poor – he would have been ensuring that they were being fed. However, this extract just shows that he would have done it in ways that did not harm the market. Just as the Earth Charter enjoins us to "eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative," so Torah commands us to never harden our hearts or close our hands to the poor (Deut. 15:7).

We learn more about a potentially sustainable market economy from the following Talmudic quotation (Bava Batra 90b-91a):

Our Rabbis taught: It is not permitted to make a profit in eggs twice. [As to the meaning of "twice,"] Mari b. Mari said: Rav and Samuel are in dispute. One says: Two for one. And the other says: [Selling] by a dealer to a dealer.

While one Rabbi says that it is forbidden to make a 100% profit on a product, the other says something much more profound – it is forbidden to use what is often called a "middle-man" in trade. This provides an extraordinary challenge to the contemporary marketplace where an overwhelming majority of individuals will flock to a supermarket that gathers together the wares of many differing dealers and then will itself act as a dealer. There are many reasons why this is unsustainable, including carbon emissions from long-distance travel and trapping farmers in poverty by paying them the lowest price possible in order to win over more customers and take control of the market. The second opinion therefore leads us to an important consideration



for sustainability in the market – we should be buying directly from the producers and avoiding intermediary dealers.

This does not have to mean an end to globalised trade because by virtue of global communications we will always be able to buy products from others regardless of their location. What it does mean, though, is an end to the domination of the market by supermarkets. It means buying from producers, or collectives of producers, but not from companies that themselves have bought from those producers or collectives. Talmud (ibid.) actually specifies which products it believes should never be bought through an intermediary:

Our Rabbis taught: In Palestine it is not permitted to make a profit [as middleman] in things which are life's necessities such as, for instance, wines, oils and the various kinds of flour.

While this specification clearly relates to essential foodstuffs, it would surely be of benefit for us to consider the same for non-essential items as well in the creation of a sustainable society. But then which non-essential items are we allowed to buy? Is it possible to have a sustainable society when people cram their homes full of “stuff,” only to throw it out years later, often because a newer model has been released into the market? Since our market is flooded with many more commodities than necessities, what should we spend money on? The great Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century) explains (Mishneh Torah: Hilkhoh De'ot, ch. 5, halakhot 9-13) how he believes a Torah scholar – the ultimate person in his worldview – should spend their money:

... He provides for his family according to his means, yet without excessive devotion to this. His clothing should neither be that of kings nor that of poor men, but rather pleasant, ordinary clothing. His commerce shall be conducted in truth and faith...

This is another vision of sustainability – we do not need to compulsively “shop ‘til we drop” but we can nonetheless acquire nice items of clothing. If people produce good clothing, we can buy it... we just don't need wardrobes stuffed full of nice clothes. We provide for our families, we give them the essentials, but we only do so according to our means. With this in mind, sustainable development surely needs a reappraisal of the concept of credit. If we all bought only that which we could afford and only from the producer directly, we would instantly have a more sustainable society. In the words of the Earth Charter, we should try to “adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.” It is noteworthy that Maimonides says that the person provides for his family “according to his means” and not “according to their wants” since so much of our market is based on creating demand – indeed, the entire premise of the advertising industry is to make us want something that we previously did not want.

We have so far focussed on the economics of sustainability but a sustainable society needs to be created not just in the economic realm but also in the political, social and religious realms. It is hard to envisage the political realm embracing sustainability without the economic and social realms taking the lead, since politicians of our time invariably follow the markets and the voters. It is also hard to envisage the social realm taking the lead until the religious realm uproots the current underlying narrative of our society and supplants it with another more sustainable narrative. Such a narrative will essentially lead to a change from the mindset of NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) to what might be called IAMBY (It's All My Back Yard), and the key to such a shift is in creating a narrative that finds the mutual connectivity between human beings. Such is the task of the Earth Charter and also of Jewish teaching. Thus where we read in the Earth Charter that “...we are one human family...,” we read in Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a) that “[Adam was created alone] for the sake of shalom among people

so that no-one might say to their fellow 'My father was greater than yours'." Shalom is often translated as peace but it is a word that encompasses much more than the modern conception of peace as an absence of war. The Hebrew root letters sh-l-m carry the connotation of completeness, wholeness, soundness, friendship and unity. A particularly effective tool of social renovation or of creating a whole and healthy society, therefore, is to remind ourselves that everyone is family. To engage in any practice which oppresses another person on our planet, either by polluting their home, by locking them into poverty, or anything similarly oppressive, would therefore be impossible.

But while understanding that everyone is family can be an incredibly powerful sentiment, it's not necessarily enough to produce social change because of the differing perceptions that people have about family. What is needed is a sense of responsibility – as the Earth Charter says, "it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations." But what is the basis for that responsibility? Jewish tradition holds that "all Israel are sureties each for the other" (Babylonian Talmud Sh'vuot 39a). It understands that we are all responsible for the behaviour of others, a notion that challenges those in society today who say that we are all entitled to behave according to our own whim "so long as no-one gets hurt" (a phrase which usually means, "so long as no-one I know about gets hurt)."

This Talmudic injunction, though, is judgmental – it challenges us to work constructively with others to bring them to what we believe is a better way of behaving, it reminds us that we are responsible for each other's behaviour and that, therefore, we have a responsibility to help society by helping change the negative behaviour of others. It demands of us the judgment of positive and negative actions and of applying that judgment to others.

Central to the notion of sustainability is the concept that we can develop our community into one that answers the needs of today's individuals without compromising the needs of tomorrow's individuals. Already we have seen from Maimonides the important difference between wants and needs, but we have until now assumed that future generations have rights, and this is an assumption that at the very least requires consideration. Does someone not yet born have a right to a certain quality of life? Can they make a moral claim on the current generation? Exodus 21:22 tells us that "if people fight and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, without any other damage [to the mother] the one responsible shall be fined..." We then learn (21:23-24) that if a significant injury occurs to the woman, then the same injury shall be inflicted upon the one who caused it. What we learn from this is that those who are not yet born cannot be considered with the same rights as contemporary human beings but that we also do carry a moral responsibility toward their protection. Indeed, anyone who acts in such a way as to endanger the life of future individuals could potentially be fined. What would our society look like if we were able to fine those companies that endanger the future society with their pollutants? It would certainly be more sustainable.

While many Jewish perspectives on sustainability will focus on Shabbat, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, this perspective has taken a significantly different approach, suggesting that a more productive Jewish sustainability ethos must at the very least consider including the following:

1. A sustainable and stable market economy based on a more direct relationship between producers and consumers;
2. An assessment by all people on what they actually need and basing a market economy around supporting those needs;
3. A recognition of the equality of all people and of their deep family bond; and
4. Awareness that we carry a moral responsibility toward generations not yet considered.

Religious communities have an extremely important role in the shaping of a sustainable society since religious narrative can pierce the soul and affect change in individual and communal behaviour more powerfully than any other narrative. One of our biggest challenges today, though, is communicating the message of sustainability effectively. With so many people today believing that religion is a matter of the world-to-come instead of the world here-and-now, clergy who are passionate about sustainability find their message frequently ignored. Too many congregants assume that we are simply jumping on a bandwagon instead of expressing foundational religious beliefs.

Perhaps the strongest way to communicate the message of sustainability is by normalising it, as opposed to making its validity a matter of public discourse – “How can we act sustainably?” is significantly more powerful than the continual “Do we really need to act sustainably?” The strongest way to normalise something in the faith communities is to show that everyone is talking about it, and this is perhaps best achieved by having differing faith communities come together to publicly declare their shared commitment to a common cause, such as sustainability. This bringing-together and normalisation is something we have achieved with IDEA: Interfaith Dorset Education and Action, an interfaith environmental group that is now in touch with over 440 differing faith communities on the South Coast of England. Recently nearly a quarter of these communities tentatively agreed to work towards an interfaith sustainability agreement. Interfaith dialogue in recent years focussed too strongly on how similar we all are whereas to successfully bring differing faith communities together, we have to acknowledge a common bond and then show our difference, not our similarity,

around that common bond. Preservation of the Earth and of humanity is a common bond. IDEA helps differing faith groups express how they will respond practically to that common bond through their own religious idiom. IDEA also set up a website, [www.eco-faith.org](http://www.eco-faith.org) which can be accessed globally to show how we share a common bond but express that bond differently.

People today are cynical, especially when it comes to change and even more so when it comes to change of the scale necessary for ours to become a sustainable society. By learning the lessons from our traditions and from contemporary documents such as the Earth Charter and by normalising the sustainability dialogue within those faith communities, perhaps ours will be “a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”



# Contribution of Christianity to Sustainability

Leonardo Boff

Leonardo Boff (Brazil) is one of the founders of liberation theology and was for many years Professor of Systematic and Ecumenical Theology at the Franciscan Institute of Petropolis, in Rio de Janeiro. Later he was a Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. He is the author of more than sixty books in various areas of philosophy, theology, and ecology. Currently, he follows grassroots organizations and speaks at conferences and courses on spirituality, ecology, ethics, and ecumenical theology in Brazil and abroad. He is an Earth Charter Commissioner.

We have reached a point in the process of degradation of our ecosystems and the planet Earth that the physiochemical and ecological basis of life is threatened, as is stipulated in the Earth Charter Preamble. If a 4 degrees Celsius abrupt warming occurs - as many scientists have predicted may happen because of the increase of methane in the atmosphere and the thawing of the permafrost - life as we know it, including human life, will be in serious danger.

Facing the possibility of this global catastrophe for both humans and our planet, all of us – both individually and collectively – have to make our own specific contribution – our knowledge, our institutions, our religions and our churches. What can Christianity offer? I can see some relevant points.

## 1. God's good creation

In the first place, we must live out a cosmic spirituality of creation. The Christian faith talks more about creation than nature. Creation means that at all times God is saying, fiat, "create". Creation is not a matter of the past; it is occurring every moment in the present. If God were not permanently sustaining all beings in their existence, they would return to the nothing from which they came. If beings are

born from God's loving word, it means that we must embrace and respect them as real sacraments which speak of the love and power of God. They are visible signs of God's action all over the world. We can find God in everything, and in doing so, live out a cosmic spirituality.

## 2. God's presence within creation

Secondly, the human being was created to be a creator. This is to say that humans have the mission of prolonging the creative act of God. God wanted a world that was evolving and imperfect so that humans, with their intelligence, creativity and work, would perfect it. Therefore, the world belongs to God, but simultaneously also belongs to humans. Our actions in nature and our technology are instruments by which we are humanizing the world and collaborating with the cosmogenic, biogenic and anthropogenic process. Human beings were created as creators. Thus, we are the copilots of the process of evolution at the human and terrestrial levels. Unfortunately, science with consciousness has not always been practiced. Most of the time it is at the service of the market, rather than life. Christian faith is ecocentric and biocentric: first life and the forms of life, then human commodities.

### 3. Cosmic Christ in evolution

Third, the world was touched by the Son of God, who became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a Mediterranean carpenter and peasant. This man must be seen from inside the process of evolution. The elements that are part of his and our reality – carbon, iron, silicon, and others - were forged at the core of great red stars. They exploded and threw these elements in all directions, from which the galaxies, the stars, the Earth, and all of us were formed. Jesus' life and consciousness burst forth from within this evolutionary process, in an advanced moment for the complexity of the energy, information and matter in evolution. The most ancestral archetypes of humanity - the characteristics of his Jewish people - are present in him. Jesus has cosmic, biological, anthropological and Jewish roots.

All of these, at the time of the Incarnation, began to belong to the Son of God, who took them on. Through that all the elements of the universe became involved in the Incarnation and in a deification process. There is an element of the Cosmic Christ in the universe. As a result, we must treat all beings with utmost respect. They are sacred, they have Christ's design, and they have been, in some way, deified. How can we mistreat them? To do so is to hurt the Son of God.

Because of the Resurrection, Jesus gained cosmic dimensions. Resurrection is not the reanimation of a corpse but much more: it is the emergence of the new man that has reached the end of the evolutionary process. Resurrection is a revolution within evolution. With the Resurrection, creation reached its end, to the extent that He surpassed time and space limits and lives in fullness within the whole universe, in a way that had already been anticipated. According to a saying from the 50s CE, prior to the Gospels, Jesus said: "The world was born from me and returns to me. I lifted the stone and I am under it, I cut the firewood and I am inside

it, because I will be with you every day until the end of the world." Here is the cosmic presence of the Resurrection in the world's matter. Thus, embracing the world, we are embracing God, his Son Jesus, who has been made part of the universe and our brother.

### 4. The Spirit is the universal Energy in the world

In the fourth place is the presence of the Spiritus Creator, the Holy Spirit within creation. He floated over the original chaos and from there took out all beings. He is the divine Energy who gives life, movement, beauty and meaning to all creation. He was and is always present in the creation, converting chaos into new order, with new relational networks which connect and reconnect everyone emerging from the complexity. Where there is love, solidarity, compassion, forgiveness, creation - there you can identify the presence of the Spirit. He arrives before the missionary because he always helps people in becoming open to the Mystery, to the God of a thousand names. He drives the whole evolutionary process toward a good end. This is why the Christian faith favors seeing, in other people, different cultures, and the religions of the world, the presence of the Spirit's energies: grace, goodness, dignity and care for everything that exists and lives.

An ancient proverb from the mystic Eastern Church says: "The Spirit sleeps in the stone, dreams in the flower, feels in the animal and knows that he feels in the man". Here the cosmic presence of the Spirit can be seen. This universal vision of the Spirit implies treating each being with the utmost respect, especially living and human beings, because they are special carriers of the energies of the Spirit. If a human being learns to respect even the smallest being of creation, no one will have to teach him how to love because he is already living it concretely.

## 5. Transparency and panentheism

In the fifth place, there is a rich ecological perspective which is transparency. Christian faith, due to God's incarnation into human reality, surpasses the dual vision inherited by the Greek culture between transcendence and immanence as opposed realities. We Christians talk about transparency. Transparency is the presence of transcendence within immanence, making immanence transparent. As Jesus said: "The one who sees me, sees the Father". In the concrete reality of Jesus we discover the presence of the Father. Jesus made himself transparent in the presence of the Father, so that people could see Him through Jesus. This is transparency, a characteristic of each being of the universe that takes us to the Source of every Being, to God.

Theology also uses another expression to explain this mutual presence of creature and Creator. It talks about panentheism. Panentheism means that all things are in God and God is in all things. There is no insuperable abyss. There is a mutual presence of one inside the other, each one preserving their own identity, God remaining God and the creature continuing as creature. But there is communion and interlacement between them. We should not confuse panentheism with pantheism. In pantheism, there is no difference between creature and Creator: everything is God - the rocks, the water, the animals and the human beings - which leads to contradictions. In panentheism, differences are preserved, but communion bonds are emphasized.

## 6. God is the communion of people and relations

Finally, Christians have their own way of conceiving God. God is a Trinity of Persons. We are not talking about three Gods, because God does not multiply. It is about understanding God as a set of relationships between several persons in such a deep and intimate way that they make one sole God. Ultimately, what

is meant is that God is not solitude but Communion, a Communion of three unique persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As we know from mathematics, unique is not a number but a singularity. Therefore, the three unique persons are different in order to allow for communion among them, the love that connects them. This perspective is directly ecological because, from quantum physics, we know that everything is relationship and that nothing exists outside relationships. The universe and all things are created as the image of God - Trinity; this is to say that the universe is a relationship just as God-Trinity is. The universe is more than just the sum of all beings. It is a set of relational networks that have intertwined, forming the complex and unique immensity of the universe.

This leads us to understand ourselves within a complex and loving network of relationships, helping one another to continue existing and evolving.

## 7. The mission of human beings in creation

There is an affirmation that comes from Genesis 2 in which it is mentioned that the mission of human beings in the Garden of Eden - that is to say, on Earth - is "to care and protect". "To care" is to have a loving and non-destructive relationship with creation. "To protect" is equivalent to guaranteeing the sustainability of all beings, in the sense of keeping them alive, allowing them to reproduce and to evolve.

This vision is emphasized in the teachings of the Church, highlighting that we are responsible for the inheritance received from God. This means carrying an attitude of respect and of a relationship which is not exclusively utilitarian toward nature, but is respectful in recognizing the intrinsic value of each being. Ultimately, we all come from the heart of God and we must treat each other as brothers and sisters, with the mysticism lived by Saint Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology, as our example.



At present, many Christians and churches have embraced the Earth Charter principles because they see in it, in a secular way, the biblical perspective of responsibility toward Mother Earth and social justice that is linked to ecological justice. In many base communities (in Brazil alone, there are approximately 100,000), the decision has been made to deepen into sustainability education which implies a frugal and supportive use of all nature's goods and services, avoiding as much as possible the use of pesticides, encouraging family organic agriculture and promoting the utilization of all residues as ways of generating energy. They have even conceived the ecclesial base communities as ecological base communities.

Internalizing these visions is the task of religious education, whether it be in catechesis or in preaching. Increasingly this education is including the ecological dimension, with care and love for all creation because it carries the great Mystery that lives in the Universe, in each being and in our hearts. Creation was thought to be the body of Trinity and was not to be destroyed. This is why Christians have the unwavering hope that the present situation is not a fatal tragedy, but a crisis for a type of civilization that has to give space to another, a civilization with a greater capacity for caring for Mother Earth and for guaranteeing to all of us the conditions for life and its sustainability. We must be the actors in this new story of the Earth and Humanity: the planetary phase. Christians are called to contribute to make this possible from their symbolic, spiritual and doctrinal capital, together with other religions and spiritual paths.



# Principles of Catholic Social Teaching & the Earth Charter

Sister Theresa Nagle

Sister Theresa Nagle (Canada) became a School Sister of Notre Dame in 1981. For most of her religious life she was involved in Parish and Pastoral work in various areas of Canada. Since 2000 she has been the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation coordinator for the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Canada. She works extensively with our Stop Human Trafficking Committee and the anti-poverty group in Hamilton, ON. She's been actively involved in groups such as the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Council of Canadians, and Kairos.

Catholic social teaching – the official body of teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on social, economic, and political issues – connects with the Earth Charter in a number of important ways. The following chart demonstrates this, showing different principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and the corresponding principles in the Earth Charter (EC). Our community has found a number of ways to put these principles from Catholic social teaching and the Earth Charter into action; these are presented in the third column of this chart.

Catholic Social Teaching	Earth Charter	Corresponding Actions
<p><b>1. Dignity of the Human Person</b> – Human life is sacred and the dignity of all persons is vital. This principle is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God and is the clearest reflection of God among us.</p>	<p><b>11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity</b> a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.</p> <p>b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.</p> <p>c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.</p>	<p><b>STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING</b> I am part of our 'Stop Human Trafficking Committee,' which gives educational presentations throughout the year for different groups and youth. We have one workshop each year to invite a speaker to further educate us and the public about this terrible crime. People are used as property; as 21<sup>st</sup> century slaves, for the sex trade, labour or other reasons. No country is untouched by it. It strips women, men and children of their dignity. Fortunately there are more and more groups across the globe that are educating and advocating about this issue. We also have materials and books available to take or buy for further education.</p>



Catholic Social Teaching	Earth Charter	Corresponding Actions
<p><b>2. CST - Common Good and Community</b> – Our dignity and rights are in relationship with those of others. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy - directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society - the common good.</p>	<p><b>2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love</b> Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and protect the rights of people. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.</p>	<p><b>KAIROS</b> – It unites eleven churches and religious congregations in faithful action for ecological justice and human rights. This is in response to the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). They defend dignity and human rights for all; promote sustainable energy policies; build right relations with Indigenous peoples; inspire Canadians to seek climate justice; link women of courage around the world in common actions to end violence; and urge companies to respect human rights and ecological integrity. KAIROS’ work in sustainability focuses on four interconnected areas: climate justice, resource extraction, corporate accountability and global finance.</p>
<p><b>3. Option for the Poor</b> – The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.</p> <p>A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.</p>	<p><b>9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.</b></p> <p>b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.</p> <p>c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.</p>	<p><b>ANTI-POVERTY GROUP in HAMILTON, ONTARIO</b> This is an interdenominational group of which I am a part. The members of the group are the poor and those who advocate for them. We have peaceful rallies to bring awareness to and educate politicians and the public about the plight of those who are receiving social assistance or have low paying, part time employment. We work with other groups to organize all candidates meetings for elections for local, provincial and federal governments to assure that poverty issues are on the agenda. We have public forums to educate the public and to advocate for better conditions for the poor.</p>

Catholic Social Teaching	Earth Charter	Corresponding Actions
<p><b>4. Rights and Responsibilities –</b> Human rights must be protected. Every person has a fundamental right to life and to what is needed including food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. With these rights comes a responsibility to one another, to our families and to the larger society.</p>	<p><b>9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.</b></p> <p>a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.</p>	<p><b>UN -WORLD WATER DAY &amp; WATER BOTTLE FREE ZONE IN CANADA</b> I connect with other groups for events on World Water Day to educate that access to water is a human right and should be available to all. Water Bottle Free Zone is a campaign to remove bottled water from work places, schools and government meetings, and to replace it with permanent plastic bottles which can be refilled from the taps, or to use pitchers of water. We educate around this issue because water bottles are owned by corporations who deplete water systems and who see water as a commodity to sell rather than a human right and a necessity. Also, the bottles are often thrown into the garbage and end up in landfills. These plastic bottles are made from oil. Both of these special days are in March.</p>
<p><b>7. Stewardship of God’s Creation</b> –The goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended for the benefit of everyone. We have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. How we treat the environment is a sign of our respect for our Creator.</p>	<p><b>7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.</b></p> <p>a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.</p> <p>b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.</p> <p>c. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.</p>	<p><b>ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION</b> We promote and educate others about the 3 R’s (reduce, reuse and recycle), and we reduce our own paper use wherever possible. We recycle papers, cans, bottles and anything else that is recyclable. We also compost, making less garbage for the landfill. We try to get others to do the same. We receive and pray intercessions from Earth Care Connections. ECC promotes the conscious choice of living sustainably on small or median-sized farms, creating a healthy food system that supports a life-style valued by Saskatchewan residents.</p>

Catholic Social Teaching	Earth Charter	Corresponding Actions
<p><b>8. Promotion of Peace and Disarmament</b> - In the words of Pope John Paul 11, "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements." There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.</p>	<p><b>16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.</li> <li>b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.</li> <li>c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.</li> <li>d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.</li> </ul>	<p><b>WORLD DAY OF PEACE – SEPT. 21<sup>ST</sup></b></p> <p>We take part in activities on Sept. 21<sup>st</sup> each year and have a prayer service to pray that peace will become more and more a reality. We have planted a homemade peace pole on our property and have encouraged other places and churches to do the same, as a symbol that we promote peace. We take part in a Peace Medal breakfast in November in Hamilton, Ontario to support adults and youth in the area, who receive these medals for work they have done to promote peace</p>



# Planet Earth: Christian Values and the Principle of Sustainability

Bishop George Browning

Bishop George Browning (Australia) was ordained 45 years ago as priest of the Anglican Church. He has served as principal of one theological college and vice principal of another. He became a Bishop in 1985, and since 1998 has been an international spokesperson for the Anglican Communion on environmental issues, and currently chairs the international Anglican Communion Environment Network. He retired as the Bishop of Canberra, Australia in 2008 and currently researches, speaks and writes on the intersection between religious faith and environmental issues.

It is not possible to talk about Christian values without understanding the Christian belief that undergirds them. The fifth (and final) mark of mission of the International Anglican Communion is derived from what we believe.

*"To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the earth".*

Christian belief is focused through the life, death and resurrection of the historical person Jesus Christ, in whom Christians believe both the true nature of God, and also humanity's true nature, is revealed. This revelation is the culmination and fulfilment of the whole biblical story and it is to that story that we must turn to answer the question: "How do Christian values impact upon, and perhaps synergise with, values aspired to by bodies such as the Earth Charter?"

**1. Adam and the Adamah.** It is Christian understanding that the name given to humanity 'Adam' is derived from the name that describes the earth, 'Adamah'. Our primary identity connects us with the earth. Indeed our flourishing is inextricably tied to the flourishing of the earth. We are to understand that 'Adam' should not be understood as a single person, let alone a single male, but

refers to and is inclusive of the whole humanity. The destiny of humanity is therefore inextricably tied to the health and well being of the non-human creation. As we value the earth and all living things we value ourselves. As we dishonour the earth and other living things we dishonour ourselves.

**2. Stewardship and hostility.** In the creation narrative two completely opposite and irreconcilable pictures are painted of humanity's role with non-human creation. On the one hand it is made clear that we are to be stewards; the Hebrew word means: 'to be custodians of that which belongs to another'. On the other hand it appears that humanity is commissioned with unequal power, to control and subdue creation for our own benefit. While the two are irreconcilable, they reflect the truth of human experience. The desire for harmony, wholeness, peace or 'shalom' is a 'crie de coeur' from every generation of human beings; but lived human experience in every generation is also of hostility, alienation and destruction. Every generation lives with both, every individual must accept the possibility and responsibility of contributing to both. Christian faith therefore recognises the tension involved in being 'a part of' creation and yet being 'apart from' creation. This tension is very hard to resolve, but the first step in doing so

is to acknowledge that it exists. Christian values are therefore underlined by a concept that is hard to translate into English, its Greek being 'metanoia'. The word is usually translated 'repentance', but this is not necessarily its most helpful translation. It means 'to see differently', in other words to be open to the truth and to be transformed by it. This value is vitally important in the present context where there is militant self interested opposition to change and therefore little political appetite for it.

**3. Work and blessing.** The hebdomadal cycle is almost universally and cross-culturally accepted in the 'working week'. However its origins and intention are less well known and almost totally ignored. The creation narrative does not literally mean creation in seven days but 'a complete period of time', founding and embracing all history. At its heart is a rhythm called 'rest'. This word does not mean cessation from work but the harmony and peace of living within creation's bounds. Words associated with it are 'shalom', 'jubilee' 'fulfilment', 'harmony', 'hallowing' and 'blessing'. In other words it is Christian belief that creation has set within it rhythms and cycles that cannot be abrogated by humanity without consequence. That we have endeavoured to replace such a cycle with our own is at the heart of our problem. Our cycle, colloquially called '24/7', is essentially a cycle of productivity. Its driving force has become the fear of scarcity. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is our measure of the rhythm's success. The irony is that we produce to increase our wellbeing, but increasingly the means (productivity) is making the goal (wellbeing) more elusive. The Christian values of harmony, wholeness, justice, and wellbeing are all interconnected and relate back to the cycle we believe is set within creation and which we have abrogated to our peril.

**4. Humanity and individuality.** Since the Enlightenment, the western world has focussed its values on the individual, individual rights, private property and private ownership. Strangely and sadly Christianity has reinforced this emphasis. It is both

strange and sad because the Christian faith is not primarily about individuals, but about communities and about relationships. Christian belief is belief in a relational God from whom we are blessed with a relational world. In expressing both his Christian belief as well as his cultural understanding of 'Ubuntu', Desmond Tutu is able to say; "a person is a person through other people". He might as well have said, a person is a person in relationship: with God, other people, and the whole created order. At the conclusion of the flood narrative, part of the creation story, humanity is blessed by God in the company of all living things that come out of the ark. A single human being is only blessed through others and especially through harmonious relationship with all living things.

**5. Competition and cooperation.** Since the Enlightenment and particularly since the extraordinary contribution of Darwin, humanity has tended to measure its progress by maximising the value of competition and minimising the value of cooperation. The ultimate Christian value is of a single community where the boundaries exaggerated by competition are eliminated and where all have equal access to the 'common good' or more specifically to 'Common Wealth'. The early Christian Community was described as a community 'having all things in common'. The Christian community does not argue for the elimination of competition, it is an indelible part of our identity; but we argue for a world of balance and if one is to have ascendancy it should be cooperation.

It is said that two pillars support the house in which we all live, economy and ecology. "Economy" has become the pillar of human competitiveness. Because economy is given almost complete ascendancy over ecology, there are two very serious outcomes. Firstly, we now live in a world of gross inequity. The wealth and opportunity held by the top 5% exceeds the wealth and opportunity of the vast majority of the world's population. We know that gross inequity invites painful correction.

Secondly, competition has not simply been between human beings, but between human beings and the environment. Ecological balance and harmony has been put under relentless and escalating pressure. The stupidity of human activity is that we fail to understand that our destiny is tied to the health and flourishing of the whole created order. We are part of the creation with which we are competing. Our frenetic activity is putting our ongoing life on this planet at risk. Darwin was right about evolution, but we have been wrong to conclude that competition is the value that most enhances human development and survival - it is not, it is cooperation.

**6. Righteousness and Justice.** As a legal construct, justice is the restoring of the scales to balance. In ancient societies this was sometimes achieved through the principle of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' or perhaps more frequently through the mechanism of the scapegoat. Scapegoating remains a frequently used although usually unnamed mechanism. The judicial system in the western world delivers justice through punishment with rising community pressure for punitive rather than restorative action. However, the most serious human situations cannot be resolved this way, as witnessed by South Africa post-apartheid and Rwanda post-genocide. Both countries had to be restored through reconciliation and forgiveness.

The Christian justice ideal is not simply a legal construct. It has a moral dimension and is tied to the principle of hope. Christian hope is linked to the resurrection and by association so is justice. Justice is delivered when hope is restored, when the causes of alienation, inequity and hostility have been addressed. Ecological justice is the naming of conditions through which bio-diversity is secured, relationships become harmonious and life giving, and pressure is reduced to allow recovery and restoration. Ecological justice therefore coheres with the Christian value of justice in that at its heart lies reasonable hope in a sustainable future. The implications of this value are yet to be properly

worked through. Those who wish to protect the status quo of economic exploitation argue that reduced productivity impacts human poor. However the truth is that human poverty is increasingly related to ecological poverty; to address one is to address the other. Justice therefore requires that determination to eliminate ecological and human poverty should be a joint enterprise.

The twentieth century Christian philosopher/theologian, Simone Weil, warns that justice is elusive in situations of unequal power. She argues the powerful can, in the name of justice, do good or do harm. Justice is not something that can be done for the weaker party, but requires a context in which the weaker party discovers their own empowerment. While there are 'things to be done' by humans for the non-human creation, the most important responsibility for humanity is to give the created order space for its own restoration. Hence the reduction of carbon emissions remains the number one responsibility.

**7. Liberty and Freedom in Western culture are valued through the prism of individual rights.** Political Parties right of centre are most resistant to responsible action designed to mitigate escalating human impact upon the environment, because they interpret such action as a violation of private enterprise and individual rights. Media outlets that ideologically support this proposition unfailingly attempt to diminish and demean those who insist upon responsible action, describing them at best as 'out of step'.

The Christian value of liberty is in this context entirely counter cultural. "The glorious freedom (liberty) of the children of God", is the belief that true freedom is relational, and especially that it is not 'freedom to do whatever you like'. In the Christian sense freedom is participation in a life-giving community, accepting limitations to the personal ego and aspiring to enjoy the abundance that comes from life giving engagement. For Christians this is the community of Jesus where heaven has come to

meet earth, and potentially at least, all barriers of exclusion are abolished to be replaced by a single identity - children of God. This value again coheres with the global objective. We have now reached a point in human history where no nation can say its interests must be paramount. Global best interest is now best interest for all nations and all their citizens.

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## Orthodox Christianity and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Mel Mansour

Melhem Mansour (Syria) is a development activist, has worked on a number of UN and European Union projects in different social and sustainable development fields. He introduced ESD concepts and the Earth Charter in Syria through a series of projects in collaboration with the State Ministry of Environment and the Department of Development at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus in 2009. He has postgraduate degrees in Governmental Relations with Civil Society from the University of Glasgow in the UK and in Leadership Development from St. Francis Xavier University in Canada.

The connection between Orthodox Christianity, and the concept and purpose of sustainable development, goes back to the faith's Jewish roots. In Genesis, God creates this sphere of biodiversity – the Earth – and gives the first humans the authority to observe and control this biodiversity, an authority also passed down to all their descendants. This request, from God to Adam, directly reveals the definition of sustainable development: caring for God's creation. Rightly using this authority is key to maintaining the peace between humans and the rest of God's creation.

This witness to the importance of caring for God's creation continues throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Another important milestone in the Bible, clearly indicating a respect for biodiversity, was Noah's ark, which was commissioned to preserve two of every species of living animal. King David's Psalms also declare the respect of biodiversity and human diversity, calling upon all to glorify God together as the creation of this God, offering thanks. These Psalms show how each of God's creations have importance, and that a deprivation of any one of them affects all the others. God's creation was also glorified when God, according to the Christian faith, became a human being in Jesus – part of the creation. The teaching of the apostles, who followed Jesus, is that we must

invest in our natural resources based on our needs, without creating any kind of deprivation. In this way, humans are given the responsibility to care about Earth as the gift of God.

Based on this faith tradition, the Orthodox Church has developed a number of practices that continually remind us of our connection to the Earth. The calendar of the Orthodox Church starts with a day of prayer for nature and earth, as it marks the beginning of the harvest season on the first of September every year. In the services of the church, there are prayers which ask God to grant us, our children, and our grandchildren for the continued provision of food, the protection of our climate, and a peaceful earth without war and crisis – all of which are connected to the goals of the Earth Charter.

The Orthodox Church also regularly practices fasting, usually at the beginning of winter and the beginning of spring, seasons that are important in the life cycle of all creatures. This fasting is entirely vegan, eliminating all animal products, including dairy. The purpose of the tradition is to ask adherents of the faith to quit unnecessary lifestyles, and instead participate in sustainable lifestyles which both eliminate the gap between rich and poor, and strengthen the friendship between humans and nature.

For Orthodox Christians, even the church buildings serve as reminders of the connection between Earth and heaven. From the first era of their development, Orthodox churches have included various frescoes of ecological diversity. The actual design and architecture of the buildings represent the Ark of Noah, which was responsible for preserving the biodiversity of the creation during the Flood. These buildings also in many ways resemble ecological houses being built in many countries today because they depend on candle lighting, rather than electricity and energy. The architecture of an Orthodox church building is designed to direct the church towards the east, where the sun rises, so that the church receives the light of the sun - symbolizing the light of God - through the 12 windows in the dome, representing the apostles, or the three windows above the holy altar, representing the Holy Trinity. The church represents, for Orthodox Christians, "the paradise of God on earth" - and the frescoes and the design of the building remind followers of the rich ecological diversity present in paradise and the need to preserve that diversity until the end of time.

The leadership of the Orthodox Church has also become very involved in supporting sustainable development. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, the leader of the 400 million believers that are part of the Orthodox Church, has been given the title, "The Green Patriarch," because of his efforts to fight for ecological preservation and his commitment to the protection of God's creation. The Patriarchate of Antioch has also become involved by organizing the first national conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Syria, showing that the church has a vital role in sustainable development. This included organizing a series of art workshops in schools, as well as training workshops on Education for Sustainable Development and the Earth Charter. Other parts of the Orthodox Church, including the Patriarchate of Moscow, are also starting to lead national initiatives about environment and ecology.

This commitment to Education for Sustainable Development reaches Orthodox followers through a variety of different channels. Often, it is through the preaching during Sunday prayers, when faithful adherents gather together to pray and to listen. Also, the church has many of its own formal and non-formal educational institutions where ESD can and is being integrated, including schools and universities that belong to the church, as well as the Orthodox Youth Movement. In Syria, the development department of the Patriarchate has already started on this initiative through training workshops and a partnership with the state to develop national ESD and Green Economy action plans, with a focus on ethics of sustainable development.

These efforts are far from over. The Orthodox Church is a symbol of struggling towards the best for all humans, and so it will continue its efforts to co-lead and support sustainable development initiatives. These initiatives will focus on ESD, because education is the key for changing behavior of the generations to come. With proper education, our children and grandchildren will be able to commit to sustainable lifestyles, and to implement the church's mission of spreading the ethics of sustainable development through practical policies and actions plans in our societies. The church, as a part of its society, has the power to contribute for a positive change.



## Sustainability in Islam

Zabariah Haji Matali

Zabariah Matali (Malaysia) is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Islamic Information Centre. Zabariah was formerly the General Manager of Angkatan Zaman Mansang (AZAM) Sarawak, a leading NGO in Sarawak, Malaysia whose core business was communicating for development with sustainability as its underlying goal. She is a regular contributor to the local newspaper in Sarawak for AZAM's column The 3<sup>rd</sup> Voice, which discusses issues and concerns on sustainability from the perspectives of Civil Society Organisations.

".....Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and the water (rain) which Allah sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving (living) creatures of all kinds that He has scattered therein, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed ayat (signs) for people of understanding..." (Al-Baqarah:164)

### Sustainability in the Quran

There are numerous citations from the Holy Quran and the hadiths (sayings of the Prophet pbuh) on sustainability and the wise utilisation of natural resources. They all lead to the conviction that all elements, species, habitats and ecosystems are part of the perfect universe created by the Al-Mighty. Hence respecting the law of nature and all its components is an obligation of every Muslim, who by definition has "surrendered" or "submitted" himself/herself, body and soul, to the Creator.

The Holy Quran highlighted some principles and guidelines on sustainability, which include:

1. Adl (Justice) - governing human relationships and other living creatures;
2. Mizan (Balance) - governing not only human social and economic relationships but also the environment, especially in ensuring the equilibrium of nature, use of resources and life cycle of all species;
3. Wasat (Middleness) - choosing the middle path in economic planning, social conduct, scientific pursuits, ideological views, material, water and energy consumption;
4. Rahmah (Mercy) - governing all aspects of human relationships and treatment of all living animals, plants and insects including micro-organisms;
5. Amanah (Trustworthiness and custodianship) - Humankind is considered to be a trustee appointed by the Creator, for all earth's assets;
6. Taharah (Spiritual purity and Physical cleanliness) - generating contented individuals through spiritual purity, conscious of the presence of his/her Creator, that would result in a balanced society, living in harmony with the environment; cleanliness that would generate a healthy

society devoid of air and water pollution, as well as generating a clean economy devoid of usury and deceitful marketing techniques and business transactions;

7. Haq (Truthfulness and Rights) - Truthfulness in all dealings that recognises the respective rights of others (humans, animals and plants);
8. Ilm Nafi' (usefulness of knowledge and science) – Knowledge, whether theological, scientific or technological, must be beneficial to others (individuals and society) including future generations.

Let's look at some of the principles or values/guidelines mentioned above and how these relate to Sustainable Development and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

#### i. Adl (Justice)

It is mentioned in a hadith that the Prophet S.A.W said, "The Earth is a mosque for you, so wherever you are at the time of prayer, pray there". Treating the Earth like a mosque means treating the natural world with full respect, in a just and fair manner (adl). It means that we as humankind must accept our role as the custodian or steward of the planet, whenever it comes under assault from the actions of our fellow humankind in his/her greed for economic gain and profits.

Environmental pollution and environmental degradation are the results of an unbridled greed, without having any moral and religious consideration towards the Earth as a sacred place, a mosque. Instead the Earth is seen as a reservoir for resource extraction at every opportunity.

The Quran says, "Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned, that He (God) may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to God and begging His Pardon)..."(Ar-Rum:41)

#### ii. Mizan (Balance)

Everything in creation is made to exist in a perfect, harmonious balance (mizan). Think of the sun and the moon, which gave us night and day. Since the beginning of time, for millions of years, we have been able to benefit from this balanced system to raise our crops and to know when to sleep, work and pray. Everything has its place on Earth.

The Quran says, "...He has created man. He has taught him speech and Intelligence. The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed. And the herbs (or stars) and the trees both prostrate to Allah. And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance of (Justice), in order that you may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall short not in the balance. It is He who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures..." (Ar-Rahman: 3 – 10)

Everything has been ordered into this delicate balance and reflecting on this balance is a form of worship. "Signs for those who reflect" is a constant reminder of refraining in the Quran. Environmental disasters many a time have destroyed the balance in the constituents of an environment. The Quran teaches humanity not to disrupt this balance.

#### iii. Wasat (Middleness)

Linguistically, the word "Wasat" means the just, the best (in goodness), the top choice, the finest, the best (in quality), and the most honorable.

Over-consuming can blind us to our role as the stewards of the Earth. Being custodians of the Earth means we always check our consumption habits, for the Earth and its constituents. Far too often our over-consumption creates increasing waste. The rising amount of garbage results in increased toxicity in the land, the air, the oceans, and the rivers, which sooner or later ends up partly in our bodies.

Therefore, taking the middle path means not being excessive, nor being miserly in our economic model or set up, in our social conduct, scientific pursuits, ideological views, and material accumulation, as well as our usage of resources like water and energy.

The Quran says, "...But waste not by excess, for God loves not the wasters...." (Al-A'raf: 31).

#### iv. Amanah (Trustworthiness and Custodianship)

We have been entrusted (amanah) with this planet, this is a sacred covenant with our Creator. This trust is an obligation to protect the planet, and it comes with the gifts of many unique abilities such as thought, knowledge, speech and the wisdom to make appropriate decisions.

Amanah is directly linked to the principle of khalifah (steward or vicegerent) of the Earth. As vicegerent of this Earth, we should always remind ourselves that its True Owner is the Creator and all other creations have their rights to inhabit the Earth.

God says in the Quran, "...And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: Verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations after generations on Earth. They said: Will You place therein those who will make mischief and shed blood, while we glorify You with praises and thanks and sanctify You. He (God) said: I know that which you do not know..." (Al-Baqarah:30)

Thus in the scheme of God, humankind is the most dignified and precious of created beings in this universe as the Creator made him His vicegerent. Regrettably, however, humankind rarely acts in the light of this truth, or in an appropriate manner, whether with regard to himself or the people or environment around him.

v. Taharah (Spiritual purity and Physical cleanliness)  
Islam requires faith and belief (iman) to be founded or based on cleanliness. Some of the pillars/obligatory rites in Islam, such as the prayer (solat)

and the pilgrimage (Hajj) can only be performed in a state of cleanliness by washing in pure, clean water, free from any contamination.

Hence, Muslims have a special relationship with water, as an essential element of purification. The Quran gives us the origin and indispensability of water: "...He sends down water (rain) from the sky, and the valleys flow according to their measure..." (Ar-Rad:17). The Quran also tells us that water will replenish us. He says, "... (We) sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance..." (Al-Baqarah:22). Also, the Quran talks about how living things were made from water: "...And We have made from water every living thing...." (Al-Anbiya:30).

An established scientific fact: no water, no life anywhere! The Quran forewarned this, and humankind has not appreciated this fact nor cared about it.

Given the importance of water in our lives, we cannot take this provision for granted. According to a report by ISESCO (Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), scarcity of fresh water resources is expected to be the second most acute challenge for the world in general and Islamic countries in particular.

There are numerous values and principles in Islam which are in accord with the values and principles enshrined in Education for Sustainable Development and the Earth Charter, and yet not much is known of this. We need to tell our stories and our purpose and the role we play and should play as stewards/khalifah of this planet. Personally I believe Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the Earth Charter has allowed us to tell our story and share with people of other faith traditions, to connect and find better ways and a common platform as "people of faith" to reduce the impact of our actions. More importantly I believe ESD and the Earth Charter allow us to be creative and innovative in not only

approaching or handling issues and concerns of sustainability, but also in communicating the values and principles of our faith to society as we strive to be the best we can in protecting our planet.

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# Sustainable Development in a Muslim Context

Muhammad Nouh

Dr. Mohammad Nouh Ali Ma'abdeh Alqadi (Jordan) is currently at the Islamic Sciences International University as Faculty member. He has also taught at Al-Balqa Applied University, Al-Balqa Jordan and at Al Albayt university Amman. He served the Jordan Civil Defence of Jordan, Amman / Jordan as Mufti of the civil defense (1991-1999). He is a Friday preacher and an Arbitrator in the Jordanian courts. He received his Ph.D. and Master's degree from the University of Jordan in Amman.

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

## Sustainable Development: Definition

Sustainable development may be defined, from an Islamic perspective, as a multi-dimensional process that seeks to strike a balance between economic and social development on one side, and the environment on the other. It seeks for humans to use resources in the best possible way, accounting for the environment upon which those resources rely.

From an Islamic point of view, human beings are God Almighty's representatives on the planet Earth, and they are entitled to benefit from its resources without selfishly monopolizing them. Human beings must seek to develop this planet in accordance with the provisions of the Holy Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad "Sunnah", with the stipulation that current needs must be met without jeopardizing the rights of future generations.

Development is reported in Qur'an under the expression "Architecture and Construction", God says: "It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein" (Surah HUD, verse 61) in this verse indicates the necessity of building

land. And also our Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said: "if the Final Day comes upon you while you were planting a seed, then continue on planting it."

## The Makings of Sustainable Development

### First: Honoring Human beings

Islam's vision of sustainable development pays special attention to human beings, as they are the ones who both bring about development and are the first to benefit from its returns. Human beings are part of this universe; made of earth clay; full of sophisticated spirituality that makes them similar to angels. These two elements - body and spirit - are integrated into one holistic creature. The relationship between the two elements can be explained from different perspectives as follows:

- God honoured human beings and favored them over many other creatures. In the Quran, God Almighty says, "We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation" (Surat Al Isra, Verse 70).
- Humans are not only consumers, but also producers for themselves and others.



Furthermore, Islam instructs us to perfect any work we undertake.

- God Almighty endowed human beings with many seen and unseen strengths to build the earth and promote life on it.

God Almighty made all other creatures and blessings in the universe (e.g., water, air, animals, plants, inanimate creatures, the earth, sun, moon, night, day, etc.) accessible to human beings. God says, "Do ye not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made his bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen?" (Surat Luqman, verse 20). That means that human beings are entitled to utilize and search for these resources to build their own lives and the universe, in accordance with God's instructions. The proper management of these resources entails:

- Maintaining an overall balance with the surrounding environment;
- Ensuring the survival of all species; and
- Using only the amount needed, avoiding waste and the depletion of resources.

### **Second: Comprehensiveness of the Environment**

Comprehensiveness is related to a vision according to which the environment is one integrated entity, and the components of the environment are interchangeably connected in a system where the existence of every creature – living or inanimate – relies upon these components. The whole entity relies on the parts and, similarly, the parts rely on the whole entity for survival. Many verses in the Quran that talk about the unity of the universe indicate this relationship. When God Almighty talks about the universe, he does so by referring to its large components (i.e., the earth, heaven, and water) which, according to modern ecology, comprise a massive ecosystem known as the biosphere. In addition, many verses in the Quran associate earth with heaven, whereas others refer to what is between them. This shows that the Quran talks about comprehensiveness, which was

only discovered by scientists in recent years after concluding that Earth and its surroundings comprise an integrated and indivisible environmental system.

God Almighty says in the Quran, "in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah Sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they Trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth;- (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise." (Surat Al Baqara, Verse 164)

Whereas environment is considered comprehensive and holistic from Islam's perspective, all humanity must be concerned with it, and all Muslims must strive to both develop it and protect it from harm and corruption, in accordance with Islamic ethics.

### **Third: Balance**

Land, sea, air, forests, the arctic, the desert, the mountains, etc., are different types of environmental systems which together form one integrated environmental system comprising the planet Earth, including its atmosphere, waters, continents, and the plants, animals and human beings which exist in its air, land, and water.

This comprehensive environment balance has been affected by the practices of human beings, their detachment from it, and their desire to control it. Humans have made major changes to the environment, which have resulted in widespread problems in the oceans, on the continents, and at various levels of the atmosphere. Due to human beings' selfish attitude towards the environment, the balance, coordination and harmony of the universe have all been negatively affected. In the Quran God Almighty says, "Mischievous has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned".

God Almighty detests corruption of all kinds, including environmental corruption, which includes environmental disorder, damage, and lack of coordination. This may be the result of pollution, excessive and irrational exploitation of resources, and invasion of natural settings. Corruption can also be the result of unplanned changes made by human beings to the integrated system which ensures life within the environment.

#### **Fourth: Limited Resources**

The Holy Quran makes reference in several verses to limited resources. For example:

"And there is not a thing but its (sources and) treasures (inexhaustible) are with Us; but We only send down thereof in due and ascertainable measures" (Surat Al Hijr, 'the Stoneland', verse 21)

"And We send down water from the sky according to (due) measure, and We cause it to soak in the soil; and We certainly are able to drain it off (with ease)." (Surat Al Mumenoun 'the Believers', Verse 18).

"He set on the (earth), mountains standing firm, high above it, and bestowed blessings on the earth, and measure therein all things to give them nourishment in due proportion, in four Days, in accordance with (the needs of) those who seek (Sustenance)." (Surat Fusselat 'signs spelled out', verse 10)

All of the above verses explain the fact that human beings must handle resources wisely, and that no matter how rich and immense these resources seem, they are, nevertheless, limited and must be handled rationally.

#### **Fifth: Environmental Protection**

The Holy Quran calls for protecting the environment. In several verses in the Quran, human beings are ordered to do so. Violation of this order is considered a sin. God Almighty says, "And Allah loveth not those who do mischief" (Surat Al Ma'eda 'The Table', verse 64), "But waste not by excess: for Allah loveth not the wasters" (Surat Al An'am, 'the Cattle',

verse 141), "and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you, if ye have Faith" (Surat Al A'raf, 'the Heights', verse 85). God orders human beings to avoid doing mischief and wasting, because they cause destruction of the environment.

When God endowed humans with the Earth's bounties, he gave them the right to benefit from them. This right obligates the beneficiaries to preserve the source of the benefits that they obtain so that current and future generations can benefit as well. God Almighty says, "And the earth, moreover, hath He extended (to a wide expanse); He draweth out there from its moisture and its pasture; And the mountains hath He firmly fixed;- For use and convenience to you and your cattle." (Surat Al Nazi'at, verses 30-33). Just as human beings have the right to benefit from the earth's resources, they must also be aware that there are others who share this right with them, such as animals. In this verse, God indicates the right of animals, which highlights Islam's supremacy and class. God Almighty says, "There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end." (Surat The Cattle, verse 38).

This means that all living creatures have the right to benefit from the Earth's resources. However, this right would not be accessible to all unless humans ensure that these benefits are passed on to future generations too. Accordingly, humans must make a greater effort to protect and preserve the sources of these benefits.

The right to benefit from the environment's resources is bound by a specific timeline. God Almighty says, "On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time." (Surat Al Baqara, verse 36). This specific timeframe obligates human beings to adopt a disciplined behavior in handling natural resources, since they are not

the property of the current generation alone, but also future ones. Therefore, resources must be preserved and protected from pollution, waste, and exploitation in order to pass it on in good shape to the next generation.

## General Rules for Protecting the Environment from Harm

Islamic jurisprudence includes many rules that serve as the foundation of many regulations and laws concerning sustainable development. For example:

- “Do no harm”: This means that a human being may not cause harm to himself or to others. And he may not sustain harm as a result of the acts of others. Each person is entitled to use water for drinking and personal purposes, but may not pollute or waste it. Each environmental right has a corresponding environmental duty.
- “Warding off evil takes precedence over bringing benefits”: If an act that a person intends to do brings benefits but could also cause major harm to others, such an act is forbidden in Islam. For example, if a state dumps chemical waste in oceans, it gains benefits, but causes harm to sea life and humans. Therefore, such an act is forbidden.
- “Sustaining personal harm to ward off public harm”: the damage resulting from avoiding the frequent use of pesticides and relying on biological rather than chemical resistance is much less than the damage inflicted on many creatures as a result of polluting the soil with chemicals, adversely affecting human beings and animals as well as killing micro-organisms in the soil that are needed for its fertility.
- “Harm shall be removed”: The causes of harm must be removed. When ships dump waste in the sea, they pollute and destroy sea life and disturb the environment balance.

The entity causing harm must take all necessary measures to remove the adverse effects of its acts, because they destroy the earth. God pledged to severely torture those who do mischief on earth. This warning causes people to control their acts and bear responsibility for them.

## Conclusion

In view of the above, we may conclude that:

1. Islam considers preserving the universe, developing its resources, and protecting it to be part of the religion and not merely an optional matter. Each Muslim must monitor his own behavior even if no one else is watching.
2. The Holy Quran and the Sunnah are two fundamental sources of rules and laws. They contain provisions on how to best handle the environment and ensure sustainable development.
3. Muslim scholars formulated several rules that teach Muslims how to handle interests that could harm the environment.
4. Despite the many rules that show how to preserve sustainable development, the lack of media attention and public awareness of them mean that they are rarely applied in the Islamic World.
5. The application of the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah ensures sustainable development, not only for Muslims, but also for the world, on a just basis.
6. Competent lecturers in the field of sustainable development can explain to the public from different countries and religions and convince them that sustainable development

in all its aspects is a form of worship whereby people can get closer to God. Also, Muslim scholars can be given the opportunity to play a role in this regard by providing them with the financial and technological means to instigate an information revolution in the world, given the fact that one-fifth of the world's population is Muslim.

The values that lead to sustainable development in accordance with Islamic Sharia are namely, respecting and honoring humans, maintaining environment balance, and developing plans to sustain environmental resources for the longest amount of time possible.

7. People responsible for sustainable development may offer Muslim scholars and preachers financial, technological, and logistic support to enable them to carry out programmes that support sustainable development in the Islamic world and inform the public of its benefits and importance.
8. The goals of sustainable development are related to, and in line with, the goals of Islam, which calls for avoiding waste, monopoly, and corruption, and promotes reform and rationalization of natural resources.
9. Islam communicates through Quran and Sunnah with Muslims to achieve sustainable development. These provisions may not be ignored or violated by Muslims; they are sacred and observed by all Muslims.



## Dialogues between Faith Values and ESD Values - The Bahá'í Faith

Arthur Dahl

Prof. Arthur Lyon Dahl (United States and Switzerland) is President of the International Environment Forum, and a retired Deputy Assistant Executive Director of UNEP. A biologist (PhD, University of California, Santa Barbara) with 40 years' experience in sustainable development, he is Visiting Professor at University of Brighton, UK, working on values-based indicators of education for sustainable development (<http://www.wevalue.org>). His books have included: "Unless and Until: A Baha'i Focus on the Environment" and "The Eco Principle: Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis".

The Bahá'í writings make direct and explicit reference to the concepts behind sustainable development. For example, Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, warned that "The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... 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." With reference to individual consumption, He said "Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceeded them." Building an ever-advancing world civilization respecting the ecological balance of the planet is fulfilling the Divine purpose for the human race.

Bahá'í Scriptures describe nature as a reflection of the sacred. They teach that nature should be valued and respected, but not worshipped; rather, it should serve humanity's efforts to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. However, in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity "to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole," every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order.

As trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This attitude of stewardship will require full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. It will compel humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, realizing that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. It will also require a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development - both material and spiritual. Therefore, sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment mankind can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered - a pre-requisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival.

Bahá'ís believe that the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the nature and purpose of human life. An understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural environment is an integral part of this vision.

The question of human nature has an important place, as it prompts us to reexamine, at the deepest levels, who we are and what our purpose is in life. The human experience is essentially spiritual in nature: it is rooted in the inner reality - or what some call the 'soul' - that we all share in common. The culture of consumerism, however, has tended to reduce human beings to competitive, insatiable consumers of goods and to objects of manipulation by the market. Commonly held views have assumed the existence of an intractable conflict between what people really want (i.e., to consume more) and what humanity needs (i.e., equitable access to resources). How, then, can we resolve the paralyzing contradiction that, on the one hand, we desire a world of peace and prosperity, while, on the other, much of economic and psychological theory depicts human beings as slaves to self-interest? The faculties needed to construct a more just and sustainable social order—moderation, justice, love, reason, sacrifice and service to the common good—have too often been dismissed as naïve ideals. Yet, it is these, and related, qualities that must be harnessed to overcome the traits of ego, greed, apathy and violence, which are often rewarded by the market and political forces driving current patterns of unsustainable consumption and production.

This preoccupation with the production and accumulation of material objects and comforts (as sources of meaning, happiness and social acceptance) has consolidated itself in the structures of power and information to the exclusion of competing voices and paradigms. The unfettered cultivation of needs and wants has led to a system fully dependent on excessive consumption for a privileged few, while reinforcing exclusion, poverty and inequality, for the majority. Each successive global crisis—be it climate, energy, food, water, disease, financial collapse—has revealed new dimensions of the exploitation and oppression inherent in the current patterns of consumption and production.

It is now increasingly acknowledged that such conditions as the marginalization of girls and women, poor governance, ethnic and religious antipathy, environmental degradation and unemployment constitute formidable obstacles to the progress and development of communities. These evidence a deeper crisis—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships at all levels of society. Viewed from this perspective, poverty can be described as the absence of those ethical, social and material resources needed to develop the moral, intellectual and social capacities of individuals, communities and institutions. Moral reasoning, group decision-making and freedom from racism, for example, are all essential tools for poverty alleviation. Such capacities must shape individual thinking as well as institutional arrangements and policy-making. To be clear, the goal at hand is not only to remove the ills of poverty but to engage the masses of humanity in the construction of a just global order.

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. The shift towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable society will require attention to a harmonious dynamic between the material and non-material (or moral) dimensions. The latter, in particular, will be essential for laying the foundation for just and peaceful human relations; these include the generation of knowledge, the cultivation of trust and trustworthiness, eradication of racism and violence, promotion of art, beauty, science, and the capacity for collaboration and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.



## Teaching and communicating about sustainable development

Bahá'ís all over the world are engaged in a coherent framework of action that promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards service to humanity. These activities promote the systematic study of the Bahá'í Writings in small groups in order to build capacity for service. They respond to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker by carrying out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. They provide for the needs of the children of the world and offer them lessons that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble and upright character. They also assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. As Bahá'ís and their friends gain experience with these initiatives, an increasing number are able to express their faith through a rising tide of endeavours that address the needs of humanity, in areas such as climate change and environmental stewardship, in both their spiritual and material dimensions.

Bahá'ís believe that progress in the development field depends on and is driven by stirrings at the grass roots of society. Different communities will likely devise different approaches and solutions in response to similar needs. It is for each community to determine its goals and priorities in keeping with its capacity and resources, requiring innovation and a variety of approaches to the environment appropriate to the rhythm of life in the community.

The Bahá'í International Community has long participated in United Nations activities and the international dialogue on social justice, development, environment and sustainability. In addition, many Baha'i-inspired social and economic

development projects and organizations such as the International Environment Forum (IEF, <http://iefworld.org>), and the European Bahá'í Business Forum (<http://www.ebbf.org>) have directly addressed education for sustainable development in their work.

The Bahá'í International Community and the IEF were active contributors to the Earth Charter drafting process, and have supported the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development with conferences, events and materials, so there is a natural integration with these processes. The IEF is part of the Partnership for Education and research about Responsible Living (PERL), as it was in the preceding Consumer Citizenship Network. Bahá'ís initiated the project on Values-based indicators of Education for Sustainable Development in which the Earth Charter Initiative was a partner, and which has produced tools ([www.wevalue.org](http://www.wevalue.org)) useful for many ESD activities.

Individual Bahá'ís, Bahá'í communities and Bahá'í-inspired organizations have long been significant contributors to ESD efforts, with an exchange of tools in both directions. Educational materials and examples developed within Bahá'í communities are actively shared through sources such as the IEF web site including, for example, an interfaith study course on climate change. The Wilmette Institute of the U.S. Bahá'í Community offers on-line courses including one on sustainable development. Local community-based education and empowerment activities are open to everyone. Baha'is participate in inter-faith collaboration, internationally, for example, with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and nationally through bodies such as the US Partnership for DESD, Interfaith Power and Light, Faith and the Common Good, etc. Such collaboration on ESD will certainly grow in the years ahead.

In order to progress beyond a world community driven by a largely economic and utilitarian calculus,



to one of shared responsibility for the prosperity of all nations, the principle of the oneness of humanity must take root in the conscience of the individual. In this way, we come to recognize the broader human agenda – which subsumes those of climate change, poverty eradication, gender equality, development, and the like – and seeks to use both human and natural resources in a way that facilitates the progress and well-being of all people.

If education is to effect the profound changes in the minds of people and in the structures of society needed to shift towards sustainability, the nature of the educational processes will need to be rethought. As a starting point, the programme of education must be based on a clear vision of the kind of society that we wish to live in, and the kind of individuals that will bring this about. It needs to help learners reflect on the purpose of life and help them to step out of their cultural realities to develop alternative visions and approaches to the problems at hand, and to understand the manifold consequences of their behaviours and to adjust these accordingly.

Education must be lifelong. It should help people to develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to earn a livelihood and to contribute confidently and constructively to shaping communities that reflect principles of justice, equity and unity. It should also help the individual develop a sense of place and community, grounded in the local, but embracing the whole world. Successful education will cultivate virtue as the foundation for personal and collective well-being, and will nurture in individuals a deep sense of service and an active commitment to the welfare of their families, their communities, their countries, indeed, all humankind. It will encourage self-reflection and thinking in terms of historical process, and it will promote inspirational learning through such means as music, the arts, poetry, meditation and interaction with the natural environment.

## Making the transition to a sustainable world

The transition to a sustainable world is the fundamental aim and purpose of the Bahá'í Faith. We try in our own small way to learn what this means in practice, by applying the principles mentioned above, and to set an example for others. Where we have some success, we hope to catalyze wider change. We also participate actively in the dialogues of society on these issues, as our principles and ideas can have an impact far beyond our own community.

We believe that progress at the technical and policy levels now needs to be accompanied by public dialogue—among rural and urban dwellers; among the materially poor and the affluent; among men, women and young persons alike—on the ethical foundations of the necessary systemic change. A sustainable social order is distinguished, among other things, by an ethic of reciprocity and balance at all levels of human organization, expressing unity in diversity. Within such an order, the concept of justice is embodied in the recognition that the interests of the individual and of the wider community are inextricably linked. The pursuit of justice within the frame of unity in diversity provides a guide for collective deliberation and decision-making and offers a means by which unified thought and action can be achieved.

Ultimately, the transformation required to shift towards a sustainable world will entail no less than an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body - as well as the interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it. Among these changes are: the consciousness of world citizenship; the eventual federation of all nations through an integrated system of governance with capacity for global decision-making; the establishment of structures which recognize humanity's common ownership of the earth's resources; the establishment of full equality

between men and women; the elimination of all forms of prejudice; the establishment of a universal currency and other integrating mechanisms that promote global economic justice; the adoption of an international auxiliary language to facilitate mutual understanding; and the redirection of massive military expenditures towards constructive social ends.

The pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.



# Faith and Sustainable Development: An African Christian Perspective

Yakubu Joseph

Yakubu Joseph (Nigeria) is a researcher/PhD Candidate at the Tübingen University, Germany. He holds a Master of Science in Sociology from University of Jos, Nigeria and a Master of Arts in International Peace Studies from the United Nations-mandated University for Peace, Costa Rica. His current work and research focus on inter-religious relations in Nigeria and post-conflict state building processes and the role of religion in the formation of the new Republic of South Sudan.

## Introduction

Sustainability is becoming a common theme in African Churches today. Less than twenty five years ago, we were taught not to worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will take care of itself, and to learn from the birds of the air, who have no storage yet they survive (Matthew 6:34). We thus learned to put our trust in God who provides for us, but we failed to recognize that we have an important part to play in caring for His creation. Our preachers tended to only espouse the literal meaning of this scripture, and by implication, suggested that those who talk about sustainability were unnecessarily worrying about tomorrow. These preachers were honestly speaking about God's providence without elaborating the nuanced meaning of 'worry'. There is no doubt that this understanding of the scripture was very popular among our people because we live on a continent where half or more of the population lives in poverty, and we have learned to see every day, every meal and every sunrise and sunset as a celebration. However, sustainability is not about worrying. Rather it is about living happily and responsibly today, and thereby providing for tomorrow by conserving what we have. The second scriptural consideration that influenced our lack of receptiveness towards sustainability was based on the interpretation of the following text:

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. Genesis 1:28-30 (NIV)*

Our earlier understanding, on the basis of this text, did not allude to the relevance of sustainability. We saw those who talked about sustainability as restricting us from exercising our God-given rights of subduing and dominating the earth. We were completely oblivious to the responsibility that goes with such rights, in the context of a complex system of interdependence and interconnection called the ecosystem. We rejected any suggestion that human activities can have a negative impact on the earth and its sustainability. Concerns about environmental degradation and ecological disasters, which were even known to our ancient societies, were flatly underplayed.

Consequently, we developed an attitude towards environmental sustainability that was predicated on the limitless, 'divine right' we have over the earth.

Our situation was compounded by the general prevailing global attitude towards sustainability as well at that time. Generated by the Industrial Revolution and further advances in science and technology, the attitude of modern society towards sustainability was characterized by a combination of indifference and ignorance, predicated on the idea that humans can conquer the environment to get what they want without taking cognizance of the consequences of such actions. We simply ignored the trail of our ecological footprint and embarked on 'development', spurred largely by the desire for economic profit. Although the environmental movement began centuries ago<sup>3</sup>, it was much later, in the 1970s that it started to gain traction and climaxed with the World Commission on Environment and Development report "Our Common Future" in 1987, and the growing recognition that it can no longer be business as usual, and that the environment is not our foe. Hence, the slogan, "environmentally friendly", "green", "organic", "renewable", "recycled" and more became catchphrases<sup>4</sup>. Yet, from Stockholm in 1972 - UN Conference on the Human Environment, Rio de Janeiro in 1992 - UN Conference on Environment and Development, Johannesburg 2002 - the World Summit on Sustainable Development and, more recently the Climate Conferences in Copenhagen in 2009 and Cancun in 2010, the world's journey towards sustainability

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3. United Nations, "Environment", Global Issues, <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/environment/>

4. For more on the emergence of the concept of sustainability see Sarah Lumley and Patrick Armstrong's "Some of the Nineteenth Century Origins of the Sustainability Concept", *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 6: 367–378, 2004. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands

has been one of great challenge and promise<sup>5</sup>. Using this as a yardstick, we proudly can say that with regard to sustainability the African Churches are in step.

## Religion and Sustainable Development - a Biblical Framework

Religion plays a very important role in the lives of most Africans. A survey conducted in 2010 as part of Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project by the US-based research think tank, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, revealed that Africa constitutes the most religious part of the world. Zooming in on the continent, Sub-Saharan Africa comes out as the most religious place on earth. The study found that in some Sub-Saharan African countries over 90% consider religion as the most important thing in their life<sup>6</sup>. The least religious among the countries surveyed had 67%, clearly a majority, saying religion is the most important thing in their life. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions are the three main religious categories in Africa. Our focus here is on Christianity, and we take that to include Catholics, Protestants, Charismatics, Pentecostals, and African Independent Churches.

Religious convictions shape our attitude and worldview in very profound ways, for better or worse. Therefore, a discussion about environmental sustainability that draws from biblical principles would have a very positive impact on African Christians. The concept of Christian Stewardship enjoins us as humans to be responsible for the world, and take care of it. We are to use the earth's resources in a responsible manner. This means we must interpret the text from Genesis 1:28-30 within

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5. For an exhaustive list of international conferences and frameworks on environment see footnote #1.

6. Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project (2010) report accessed from the Pew Forum Web site: <http://pewforum.org/Press-Room/Pew-Forum-in-the-News/Survey-finds-Africa-is-most-religious-part-of-world.aspx#>

the framework of biblical stewardship. At a narrow level, stewardship reflects the belief that the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord and we must glorify Him through how we use the earth's resources.<sup>7</sup>

In Genesis 2:15, we have a clear instruction of what our attitude ought to be towards the environment. The passage says, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (NIV). So God gave us what we need, but He also gave us responsibility.

Jesus gave a broad illustration of the concept of stewardship in Matthew 25:14-30 in the "parable of the talents", where a man entrusted his servants with some money. The ones that made good use of the money and yielded profits were commended by their master. We can extend this lesson to how we use the Earth's resources. Using the Earth's resources in ways that honour God also means taking into account the needs of others. This is in tandem with the World Commission on Environment and Development's widely quoted definition of sustainable development as "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."<sup>8</sup> To honour God is to also care about the impact of what we do on others, and share in preserving God's gifts to humanity, both present and future. Therefore, the notion of inter-generational solidarity and responsibility are part and parcel of Christian Stewardship.

Christian Stewardship has two dimensions. The first dimension is "responsibility" – using the earth's resources to God's glory. In the "parable of the talents", Jesus added a second dimension which is "accountability" – implying that how we discharge our responsibility matters, coming to terms with the impacts of our action or inaction.

A Christian approach to sustainable development is therefore anchored on these two cardinal principles of responsibility and accountability towards how we use the earth's resources and the resulting impacts. Above all, sustainable development is holistic, encompassing four dimensions: social, economic, ecological and political<sup>9</sup>.

The nexus and inter-linkages between these four elements can be rendered intelligible in the context of the biblical idea of interdependence and the relationship between the body and its parts, which Apostle Paul described in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Verse 26 (NIV) says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it." The relationship between the four elements follows this analogy, and therefore we cannot afford to neglect any of the four elements if we want to achieve sustainable development.

Christian ethics also goes a long way in helping Christians to cultivate sustainable lifestyles. We do not have to wait until there is a law to compel us to act responsibly; our ethical values and principles should help us to make right choices. The Earth Charter<sup>10</sup> as an ethical framework for sustainability underscores that our conscience plays a crucial role in the way we relate to our global interdependence and individual responsibility. For example, a law may not limit how much we consume or waste, but we need to set the limits for ourselves. This inner self-regulating mechanism comes from the awareness "...that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more" (The Earth Charter).

7. Several passages in the Holy Bible illustrate the concept of Christian Stewardship. Some example are: Psalm 24:1 and Deuteronomy 10:14.

8. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) Our Common Future, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 43.

9. UNESCO, [http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_a/mod02/uncom02to2.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_a/mod02/uncom02to2.htm)

10. "The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is a product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values." <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/>

This is consistent with the biblical principle of contentment. The following passages capture the essence of this part of the Earth Charter:

*Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Luke 12:15 (NIV)*

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NIV)*

## Climate Change Actions in African Churches

Environmental degradation and climate change pose serious challenges to Africa. The continent is the most vulnerable region of the world, and the least able to adapt to the impacts of climate change.<sup>11</sup>

Environmental degradation and climate change can exacerbate communities' fragility in Africa and lead to increased in resource-based conflicts, especially pertaining to water and other natural resources. African Churches are becoming increasingly aware of this, and are taking steps to address these challenges. In a statement issued by the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi in 2008, Christian leaders from across the continent called on governments and donors to make environmental sustainability a priority, and take necessary measures to promote adaptation and mitigation efforts.<sup>12</sup>

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, many Churches in Africa have been sensitizing their members about environmental protection and tree planting in

response to desertification. Western missionaries had helped their partner Churches in Africa to establish Rural Development Programmes, Agricultural Development Programmes, Faith and Farm, People-Oriented Development Initiatives, Integrated Community Development Programmes, etc. From their tree nurseries, these programmes supply communities with seedlings to encourage tree planting. They set up demonstration farms, where they teach farmers sustainable farming techniques such as alley cropping and compost production. Poultry production and animal husbandry are also important components of the programmes. The range of services provided by these faith-based institutions is available to communities without discrimination on the basis of religion or ethnicity.

These days, a growing number of Churches are mainstreaming environmental sustainability in both development programmes and theological education. In many countries in Africa, one can find projects dedicated to climate change. These projects promote awareness about the environment and climate change issues. They carry out campaigns to sensitize the communities about environmental concerns: distribute Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials, which convey messages; organize drama and rallies; undertake advocacy activities; organize workshops and seminars; establish orchards and plantations; and participate in local and international climate change conferences. Some Churches combine climate change initiatives with others on peacebuilding, HIV/AIDS, gender, and water and sanitation.

Some theological seminaries have incorporated climate change into their curriculum, training future Church leaders and theologians on the subject. Many Christian denominations have primary and secondary schools, and some even have universities, which have also introduced environmental education. This is in line with the aspiration of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), which "...aims to integrate values, activities and principles that

11. Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Climate Change 2007, Synthesis Report, [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4\\_syr.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr.pdf)

12. "African Church Leaders' Statement on Aid Effectiveness", All Africa Conference of Churches, 21-23 May 2008, Nairobi, Kenya. <http://www.caritas.org/includes/pdf/aideffectivenessafrica.pdf>



are inherently linked to sustainable development into all forms of education and learning and help usher in a change in attitudes, behaviours and values to ensure a more sustainable future in social, environmental and economic terms” (UNESCO).<sup>13</sup>

## Future Outlook

Faith and Sustainable Development will continue to embrace each other on the African continent. The combination of faith and sustainable lifestyles will help us deal more constructively with the challenges of climate change that confronts humanity. With more people graduating from theological seminaries with a solid understanding of the biblical basis of sustainable development, more pastors teaching about environmental and climate change issues, and young and old people becoming more aware about how to adopt sustainable practices, the future looks hopeful. International organizations that are involved in promoting sustainable development can facilitate this process by supporting various initiatives through training, networking, and funding. This support needs to be extended to other religions as well. There are also numerous sustainable development initiatives among Muslim communities on the continent. African Traditional religions likewise share certain values that can be harnessed to encourage sustainable development.

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13. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) 2005-2014, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001540/154093e.pdf>





## Religion and ESD in the Context of Burkina Faso

Ousséni Diallo

Ousséni Diallo (Burkina Faso) is the Chairman of Green Cross Burkina Faso. He has been actively involved in civil society movements since he was young. He is a founding member of UNESCO Clubs in his country. Because of his work in environmental protection and natural resource management, he has been appointed in different leadership positions in organizations not only in his country but also in regional organizations of West Africa.

The new understanding of stewardship of the earth both from the biblical and scientific perspectives has led to serious commitment by African Churches to environmental concerns, and promotion of sustainable development practices.

The case of Burkina Faso is representative of the overall situation in West Africa, where members of the same family will live together and practice at least two or three different religions in the same home. These religions include Islam, Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), and Animism. To show how faith and education for sustainable development (ESD) intersect in Burkina Faso, we interviewed leaders from each of these traditions. This article presents the positions they articulated, as well as the ways in which these different traditions have found common ground around preserving the Earth.

### Traditional Religions / Animism

The tribal authorities (representing traditional religions, or Animism) who answered the questionnaire showed us their existing principles and rules, which are set up to organize the management of nature and to ensure sustainability. Supervision for these rules is collective, and all members of the community have a sense of the common good. The traditional vision, which contributes to the preservation and protection of natural resources,

is that each resource being used by individuals is made of and/or shelters supernatural forces, and thus deserves man's respect while using them. This vision for sustainable development is passed down through: (a) experience, (b) contacts between generations, (c) interdictions, and (d) the sacralization of objects.

As part of this, each person who offends an element of nature, through such acts as cutting a tree down or causing a wildfire, will systematically denounce himself out of a fear of being punished by invisible forces. Some of these rules include:

**Fruit trees:** the harvest period for the fruit of some trees is well-defined by a calendar, and all harvesting outside of that time period is prohibited. This applies to every member of the community. A period of time is also determined for the consumption of the fruit, and one person is given the authority to make that decision. This allows for the fruit to mature well, and preserves the species by allowing the seeds to grow again naturally. Thus, the natural regeneration of plant species is guaranteed.

**Sacred woods:** these constitute actual groves which are considered so holy that, in some cases, even dead wood gathered there cannot be used in making a fire. Every village has one or more of these sacred

woods, which represent a strategy for conserving biodiversity. In particular, these sites contribute to the protection of endemic and endangered species.

**Water:** traditional water management deals with the many ways in which it is used. This resource is part of both the economy and the social life of humans through its availability as a drink for the living and dead; its role in agricultural production; and as a fishery. One of the ways in which traditional religions manage this resource is by limiting pond fishing to a collective activity, done only once or twice a year. Outside of this time period, fishing is not permitted. This allows for the renewal of species and ensuring the sustainability of resources.

This vision is undergirded by values of the respect of nature, a sense of the common good, and the need for self-regulation. In line with this, traditional religions place an emphasis on using natural resources for the purposes of consumption needs, and not for individual financial gain.

This presents a number of challenges in contemporary society, however. For one, there is a standardization of concepts and lifestyles which does not fit with the more local, specific, and diverse responses to sustainable development that exist in traditional religions. Many of the rules and principles that were protecting nature can no longer be applied because of the changing context of their societies. Finally, the community spirit that is so important for these rules has been replaced by a spirit of individualism. In order to meet these challenges from the perspective of traditional religion, ESD must use (a) local charters, (b) identify messages inciting to reduce the pressure on natural resources, (c) develop modules on environmental education for adults focusing on their hobbies, (d) implement environmental education in the children's scholar programme (e) and develop traditional ways at the same time.

## Revealed Religions: Islam and Christianity

The vision of sustainable development, in both Islam and Christianity, is passed down through the revelation of God in the texts of the Bible and the Koran. Referring to the Bible and the Koran, Christian and Muslim leaders both declared that God created humanity and installed him in the Garden (world) so that he can maintain it and ensure that it blossoms completely. There is an obligation, in both religions, to respect nature as well as the Creator. God gives human beings the opportunity to rule and subdue the Earth, with the task of guarding and watching over this environment and guaranteeing its sustainability. man is the keeper of the garden, rather than its master. He must take care of what is present around him. He must, thereby, make use of the totality of his potential so that the Earth will bloom and he will meet the expectations of his Creator.

For these revealed religions, their contribution to ESD focuses on (a) environmental awareness, (b) waste reduction through a rational management of resources, (c) preservation of the people's health, and (d) maintaining a hygienic living environment. Each of these religions also contributes its own specific principles and values.

### Islam

The Koran outlines five specific principles related to ESD:

- Election: God chose Earth to be the place of residence of humanity. God's election means that everything is under His control;
- Responsibility: human beings are in charge of the organization and the management of everything on Earth because he is the Khalifa (vicar, lieutenant) of God on Earth;
- Preservation: human beings must preserve Earth and not corrupt it, through deterioration, pollution, or in other ways, after God made it inhabitable;

- Corruption: human beings' actions on land and sea must not corrupt them. The original divine ecology must be preserved;
- Perfection: human beings must always be concerned, and responsible, for the perfection of the Earth.

Of these, one of the most important is preservation, as it directly leads to conservation and sustainability. In addition to these, there are a number of other important beliefs which lead to participation in ESD. For one, Muslims believe that religion must be the conscience of the world. In particular, it must be part of establishing a morality for the use of technology without creating a restraint on it; Man's technological aspirations must be oriented and channeled properly. Also, according to Islam, the morality of the prophets is used as an example for the behavior to adopt with regards to all nature – including the land, water, plants, and animals.

## Christianity

For Christians, sustainable development is based on respect for life, which implies a respect for everything that guarantees and protects life. This includes, according to the Bible, submission to and respect for the rules which have been established by God. Especially in the Catholic Church, with its social teaching, these rules are meant to help develop humans in every aspect of his life, and ensuring sustainable outcomes from his actions. For this transition to a sustainable world to happen, however, there must be a change in the man's heart. For many Christians, social organizations seem impervious to the message of God. The contribution of religion in the efforts for ESD around the world thus must come primarily through the transformation of Man's heart, because he is not capable of bringing change if he does not seek God's help. Thus, their goal is that humans would recognize his position in the world and assume the role God entrusted to him, according to the laws set out in the Bible.

## Coming Together: The Three Faiths and the Earth Charter

All three communities could easily agree that the Earth Charter can be an important part of ESD. For this to happen, we must:

- Implement the principles and rules above mentioned in educational programmes;
- Commit leaders to coordinating their actions;
- Communicate through religious and tribal leaders.

The consensus around these three points is a response to the fact that today, transmission of values comes through a wide variety of channels: formal and informal education, the media, and many others. Religious leaders must work within these communication channels – Friday prayers, Sunday offices, TV, radio, and others – to make sure that these values are being communicated. With consistent communication of these faith values, there is the possibility of a transition to a sustainable world.



## Sustainability, ESD and the Hindu Tradition

Kartikeya V. Sarabhai<sup>14</sup>

Kartikeya V. Sarabhai (India) is the Founder Director of Centre for Environment Education. He has long been associated with IUCN, and was the chair of South and South East Asia IUCN Commission on Education and Communication and is currently the vice-chair of the Indian National Commission of IUCN. He was a member of the Indian delegation to United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio in 1992 and World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) at Johannesburg in 2002 and was the co-author of India's report for UNCED.

At the sixty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly, in 2010, the UN Secretary-General submitted a report on how sustainable development approaches and initiatives have allowed communities to reconnect with the Earth. The report recognized that, "Around the world, ancient civilizations have a rich history of understanding the symbiotic connection between human beings and nature".<sup>15</sup>

It was a session devoted to 'Sustainable development: Harmony with Nature'. On the Hindu Tradition it noted, "The Vedic philosophy of India has always emphasized the human connection with nature. Vedism is a way of life based on scriptures called Aranyakas, or forest books, which were written by sages who lived in the forest. The Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smriti contain some of the earliest messages on ecological balance and the need for people's ethical treatment of nature. They emphasize harmony with nature and recognize that all natural elements hold divinity".<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>. I would like to thank Dr. Kiran Chhokar, Programme Director at CEE for her editorial support and Ms. Purvi Vyas, Project Officer at CEE, for research assistance for this paper

<sup>15</sup>. UN General Assembly A/65/314 Sixty-fifth session, Item 20 (i) of the provisional agenda, Sustainable development: Harmony with Nature, 19 August 2010. Para 17.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibid. Para 21.

While respect for nature and all living things is a critical aspect of the Hindu tradition, there are many other aspects that need to be looked at when we discuss Hinduism, Sustainability and ESD. In this paper I first discuss values and ethics that are central to Hindu thinkers and how these relate to sustainability. For this we use the Earth Charter, which is perhaps the best articulation of values and ethical principles needed for "the transition to sustainable ways of living and sustainable human development"<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing this, UNESCO endorses that, "the Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a fair, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It serves as a base of ethical principles inspiring the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and promotes an integrated approach to global issues".<sup>18</sup>

In this article, we also look at how Hindu values and thinking are communicated and imbibed, the relationship this has with ESD, and the significance given to knowledge in the Hindu tradition.

<sup>17</sup>. "What is the Earth Charter?", <http://www.earthcharterin-action.org>, accessed on July 9, 2011

<sup>18</sup>. Values of Sustainable Development, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-sustainable-development/sustainable-development/values-sd/> accessed on July 9, 2011.

## Hinduism and the Three Pillars of Sustainable Development

The concept of Sustainable Development has three aspects to it: environmental, social, and economic.

Many studies have discussed the close connection between Hinduism and ecology. In a recent article, two Malaysian scholars write, "The religious traditions of India are rich and various, offering diverse theological and practical perspectives on the human condition."

The Vedic traditions of Hinduism offer imagery that attests to the power of the natural world. Scholars of the Vedas have identified various texts and rituals that extol the earth (bhu), the atmosphere (Bhuvah), and sky (sva), as well as the goddess associated with the earth (Prthvi), and the gods associated with water (Ap), fire and heat (Agni) and wind (Vayu)."<sup>19</sup>

The concept that the Earth is the supporter of all life and that human action should be careful not to destroy the balance is also a strong theme running through the Vedas. In the Atharva Veda, for instance, a hymn goes, "May that Mother Earth, like a Cosmic Cow, give us the thousand fold prosperity without any hesitation, without being outraged by our destructive actions."<sup>20</sup>

When a classical Bharata Natyam dancer steps on to the stage, she touches the floor and in a little prayer asks forgiveness from the Earth for the fact

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19. Razak, Ratna Roshida Ab and Zainal Abidin Sanusi, 'The Concept of Sustainable Development in Human Civilisation: An Introspective View', *KEMANUSIAAN: the Asian Journal of Humanities* 17 (2010), 19–36

20. Atharva Veda, Kanda 12, hym 1, verse 45, quoted in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (ed.) *Hinduism and Ecology: the intersection of earth, sky, and water* Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass., 2000. p.11.

that she is going to stamp hard on the ground while she dances.

Several elements of nature have also taken on specific meaning. The inner city of Ahmedabad has few trees but the ones you will see are usually Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), the tree of enlightenment. It is a tree people will generally not cut. The monkey, the elephant, the peacock and the snake have religious significance and are not harmed. Even the Blue Bull (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), the largest antelope in Asia, which lives near agricultural fields and often raids and damages crops, is thought to be a relative of the cow and therefore protected.

In an article on the Earth Charter and Hinduism, Kamla Chowdhry wrote, "Hindus regard everything about them as pervaded by divine presence. The rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, flora and fauna, are all manifestations of God, and therefore there is a deep respect and gratitude felt towards nature."<sup>21</sup>

This respect is manifested in a vast network of sacred rivers, sacred mountains, sacred forests, trees and plants, and even sacred cities across India. "The whole emphasis of the present as also the ancient Hindu religious practices is that human beings cannot separate themselves from their natural surroundings, because Earth has the same relationship with man as that of mother with her child".<sup>22</sup>

On the social plane, a key aspect is how a society deals with diversity. In a multicultural world this is an essential element of sustainability. It is important for people to have an understanding of alternative belief systems, customs, and even values. In what is perhaps the most fundamental of beliefs of any faith, Hinduism does not believe there is only

21. Chowdhary, Kamala, "Earth Charter: Sacred India" in *Earth Charter + 5: A Progress Report*, Steven C. Rockefeller and Miriam Vilela (editors), *The Earth Charter*, 2005, p147, [http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/Earth%20Charter%2B5%20Progress%20Report%20%20August%202005%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/Earth%20Charter%2B5%20Progress%20Report%20%20August%202005%20(3).pdf), accessed July 17, 2011

22. Ibid p147-148

one way to God and that only one of the Hindu ways is right. A Sanskrit shloka goes, “Akashat patitam toyam, yatha gachati sagaram, sarva deva namas-karah keshavam prati gatchati.” Just as every drop of rain falling from the sky ultimately finds its way to the ocean, so do prayers offered to any god find their way to the Supreme.

There are several dimensions to social sustainability.<sup>23</sup> Among these are poverty alleviation, equity, removal of discrimination and gender equality. Traditionally Hindu society has been stratified by varna and caste. There is also the concept of Karma, which implies that deeds in past lives will affect one's current situation. This leads believers to conclude that both the fortunate and the less fortunate are in that position as a result of their own actions.

These beliefs have traditionally not led to a sense of equity. The saddest part of the caste system was the treatment of some sections of society as 'untouchables'. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a jurist, philosopher and thinker who became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, was born into one such poor family of an 'untouchable' caste. He fought a losing battle against untouchability in Hindu society, but finally renounced Hinduism along with several of his followers to convert to Buddhism. “His main objection to Hinduism was that it sanctified inequality and untouchability through its doctrine of Chaturvarnya [four varnas]. Buddhism, on the other hand, rejected Chaturvarnya and supported equality.”<sup>24</sup> So while tolerance and the acceptance of social diversity are very positive aspects of Hinduism, the caste system can be a hindrance to the social and economic aspects of sustainability.

23. Earth Charter, III Social & Economic Justice, [http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_a/mod02/uncom02to501.htm#III](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_a/mod02/uncom02to501.htm#III), accessed on July 17, 2011

24. Ramendra Nath. ‘Why Dr. Ambedkar renounced Hinduism?’ 2000. <http://www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb/Why.htm> accessed on July 17th 2011.

Hinduism has many references to needs and consumption. According to Manusmirti (4.2), believed to be one of the oldest codes and rules of conduct and behaviour: “Happiness is rooted in contentment; its opposite is rooted in misery.”<sup>25</sup> The Isa Upanishad speaks of how we should consume only according to our needs. The first verse of the Upanishad is:

*Ishavasyam Idam Sarvam Yat Kim Cha Jagatyam Jagat*

*Tena Tyaktena bhunjitha, ma gradha kasyasvid dhanam*

*Know that all this whatever moves in this moving world is enveloped by God.*

*Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation, do not covet what belongs to others.*

Mahatma Gandhi said about this verse that, “If all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Ishopanishad were left in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live forever.”<sup>26</sup> He interpreted this verse as, “Since God pervades everything, nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed unchallengeable Master of everything you possess. If it is universal brotherhood – not only brotherhood of all human beings but of all living things – I find in this first Mantra of Isha Upanishad.”<sup>27</sup>

We have so far discussed the values that Hindu thought espouses. For ESD it is also interesting how Hinduism communicates and helps inculcate these values.

25. Cited in KL Seshagiri Rao, “The five great Elements (Pancamahabhuta): An ecological perspective” in Hinduism and Ecology, Chapple and Tucker (editors). 2000, p. 36

26. <http://www.intent.com/paulgopal/intents/study-isha-upanishad-gandhi-said-if-all-upanishads-and-all-other-scriptures-happen>

27. Gandhi, Mohandas K cited in Eknath Easwaran, The Upanishads. Translated for the Modern Reader, p. 205. Nilgiri Press, 1987.



## Hinduism and ESD

In the Mahabharata, the final war took place between two sets of cousins: the Pandavas, who represented the good and the just, and the Kauravas, the evil and unjust. Before the war they both went to Lord Krishna to seek his help. Krishna agreed to help both. He offered his entire army of millions to one side, and himself to the other--not as a warrior but only as an advisor. Arjuna, who came on behalf of the Pandavas, had the first choice. Without the slightest hesitation he chose Krishna and his counsel. The importance of knowledge over material property is seen throughout Hindu stories and scriptures.

Saraswati is the Hindu goddess of Knowledge and Learning. "The name Saraswati came from "saras" (meaning "flow") and "wati" (meaning "a woman"). So, Saraswati is symbol of knowledge; its flow (or growth) is like a river and knowledge is supremely alluring, like a beautiful woman.....She is not adorned heavily with jewels and gold, ...but is dressed modestly — representing her preference of knowledge over worldly material things.... In India it is customary that, out of [respect](#), when a person's foot accidentally touches a book or any written material (which are considered as a manifestation of Saraswati)...., it will be followed by an apology in the form of a single hand gesture ([Pranāma](#)) with the right hand, where the offending person first touches the object with the finger tips and then the forehead and/or chest."<sup>28</sup>

Hinduism does not see knowledge as static. The scriptures and ancient texts are seen not as the final word, as they are in many religions, but as the beginning of a journey seeking truth. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, a philosopher and scholar of Hinduism who became the President of India, wrote:

*"Hindu thought has no mistrust of reason. There can*

<sup>28</sup>. Saraswati, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saraswati>, accessed on July 25, 2011

*be no final breach between the two powers of the human mind, reason and intuition. Beliefs that foster and promote the spiritual life of the soul must be in accordance with the nature and the laws of the world of reality with which it is their aim to bring us into harmony .... Precious as are the echoes of God's voice in the souls of men of long ago, our regard for them must be tempered by the recognition of the truth that God has never finished the revelation of His wisdom and love. Besides, our interpretation of religious experience must be in conformity with the findings of science. As knowledge grows, our theology develops. Only those parts of the tradition which are logically coherent are to be accepted as superior to the evidence of the senses and not the whole tradition."*<sup>29</sup>

He concludes that "Hinduism is a movement, not a position; a process, not a result; a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation."<sup>30</sup>

Understanding sustainability issues requires people to think of long chains of relationships, of cause and effect, intentional and otherwise. Often to explain how a particular lifestyle impacts climate change, one needs to go into several such loops of actions and their consequences. In a Climate Change Masters programme, I usually start with a story from the Mahabharata. In the beginning there is a story of how the river Ganga came to Earth as a beautiful woman. King Santanu fell in love with Ganga and wanted to marry her but she had a condition: "If perhaps I do something, whether it pleases or displeases you, O king, I must never be stopped nor harshly spoken to.... If you must stop me or scold me, I shall surely forsake you."<sup>31</sup> He agreed. She bore the king seven sons and she drowned each one in the river. Only when the eighth son was born the king could no longer be a silent spectator and stopped her and asked why

<sup>29</sup>. Radhakrishnan, S. (1926) *The Hindu View of Life*, Harper Collins Publishers India, New Delhi, 2009 p. 5-9

<sup>30</sup>. Ibid p. 95

<sup>31</sup>. Ibid p. 219



she did that and who she really was. She revealed the truth and then left. The son who survived is Bhishma, one of the central characters of the epic. When I ask students what was the reason for this strange behaviour, all hands go up. And each story has another to understand the one before it. As the students mention each story, and each story behind each story, I draw little circles to show the connections, and a long complicated chain appears, perfectly comprehended. So when a similar long chain showing complex relationships connecting human actions to environmental consequences is drawn, there is no difficulty in understanding the causes and the consequences.

The story associated with the writing of the Mahabharata is also very interesting from an ESD perspective. The story goes that Vyasa, the sage who wrote the Mahabharata, was looking for someone to write the story while he dictated it. Lord Ganesha volunteered but laid down a condition. "My Lord, you should not stop the narration at any point. The story must flow without pause. I shall write it down as smoothly as one gulps down a cup of water. If you stop at any point, I will give up my job and go away". Vyasa, in turn, accepted this condition but laid down one of his own. "Yes,... But you should understand every word before you set it down." And so started the composition of the story of Mahabharata. Vyasa dictated and Lord Ganesha wrote. "Even before Vyasa completed a stanza, Ganesha would finish writing it. He would hustle Vyasa to go on with it. Vyasa knew he could not stop.[So] Whenever Ganesha hustled him, he hurled a difficult stanza at him. By the time the child-god understood it and wrote it down, Vyasa would be ready with the next stanza. The stanzas over which Ganesha had to pause have come to be called Vyasa Rahasya".<sup>32</sup>

Very often these stanzas are like riddles. I interpret this as a device to get an audience that may accept religious scriptures as absolute truths to instead think critically, a communication tool to prevent

32. Story of Ganesha and Vyasa Source: <http://www.freeindia.org/biographies/sages/vedavyasa/page10.htm> accessed on July 28, 2011

people from becoming just passive listeners. In fact, most Hindu stories contain seeming contradictions which force the listener to pause and think. Characters themselves are complex, neither all good nor all bad, with human frailties and strengths, who cannot be understood in terms of black and white.

Truth itself is to some extent seen as contextual and may vary from the perspective it is seen. "The Vedas bring together the different ways in which the religious-minded of that age experienced reality and describe the general principles of religious knowledge and growth. As the experiences themselves are of a varied character, so their records are many-sided (*visvatomukham*) or 'suggestive of many interpretations' (*anekarthatam*)".<sup>33</sup> This understanding of reality and truth is very conducive to multi-stakeholder dialogues, which are an essential component of ESD.

To conclude in the words of Radhakrishnan, "Any change of view to be real must grow from within outwards. Opinions cannot grow unless traditions are altered. The task of the religious teacher is not so much to impose an opinion as to kindle an aspiration. If we open the eyes, the truth will be seen. The Hindu method adopts not force and threats but suggestion and persuasion."<sup>34</sup> He goes on to say that, "Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. While it gives absolute liberty in the world of thought it enjoins a strict code of practice. The theist and the atheist, the sceptic and the agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life. Hinduism insists not on religious conformity but on a spiritual and ethical outlook in life".<sup>35</sup> And that is the fourth and most fundamental pillar of sustainable development.

33. Radhakrishnan, op.cit p5-6

34. Radhakrishnan op.cit p 26

35. Radhakrishnan op.cit p 53



## Engaged Buddhism & its Contributions to Sustainable Development and ESD

Toh Swee-Hin (S.H. Toh)

Toh Swee-Hin (S.H. Toh) (Australia/Canada) is Distinguished Professor at the University for Peace in Costa Rica and Laureate, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education (2000). Born in Malaysia, he has taught in Australian and Canadian universities and served as visiting professor in diverse North and South contexts in the interrelated fields of education for a culture of peace, human rights, local/global justice, multiculturalism, sustainability and interfaith understanding. From 2003–2009, he was also the founding Director of Griffith University's Multi-Faith Centre in Australia, which seeks to promote inter-faith dialogue towards a culture of peace.

Over the last five decades of its 2500 year history, the spread of the Buddhist faith worldwide has witnessed the emergence and growth of a movement known as “engaged Buddhism” or sometimes referred to as “socially engaged Buddhism” (Jones, 2003; Queen, 2000; King, 2009). As interpreted and enacted by individual practitioners, institutions, organizations or networks in both global South and North contexts, engaged Buddhism seeks to actively build a more compassionate, loving, nonviolent, just and sustainable world. For engaged Buddhists, their faith transcends individual-centred belief, understanding, rituals and a search for “enlightenment” to also encompass social action across all dimensions of life.

This growing interest and commitment to such an “engaged” perspective to Buddhism does not imply, however, that the Buddha himself and his teachings were “disengaged” or alienated from social practices and relationships. Throughout his journey as a teacher, following his “awakening”, the Buddha role-modelled to his disciples and followers not only the challenging goal of individual cultivation but also the active integration of Buddhist values, principles and knowledge into daily individual and community social living. Engaged Buddhists today

are re-reading and re-conceptualizing this holistic understanding of the Buddha's teaching in the light of contemporary social, economic, political and cultural realities, thereby eschewing a socially passive and individually-centred practice that can develop in some traditions, schools or institutions.

Engaged Buddhist thinking and practice has spanned a wide range of fields and issues of societal and worldly responsibilities, problems, conflicts and peacelessness, including preventing and resolving armed conflicts and militarization, promoting human rights, dealing with social injustices, intercultural and interfaith understanding, harmony and dialogue, counseling for jail inmates and caring in hospices. Concomitant, however, with the emergence of awareness and of urgent advocacy to face and transcend the deepening ecological crisis, engaged Buddhists have also joined hands, hearts and spirit with peoples of diverse faiths or spirituality traditions or no professed faith, to build more sustainable futures. Drawing on basic principles, values and faith wisdom of Buddhism, engaged Buddhists have provided some helpful insights as well as concrete strategies and practices that promote “sustainable development” and education for sustainable development (ESD).

One of the key principles of Buddhist teachings, *pratityasamutpada* (in Sanskrit), or “inter-dependent co-arising” or “dependent origination,” which sees all things and phenomena as interdependent and arising from multiple causes and conditions (Thich Naht Hanh, 1998: 221-249), is clearly consistent with the “sustainable development” view of the “environment” (including humanity) as comprising interdependent dimensions and elements that interact mutually and are embedded in complex relationships of causes and effects. In this regard, Thich Nhat Hanh’s (1991) concept of “inter-being” provides a very meaningful tool for guiding human beings in relating holistically and responsibly with all other beings and parts of “nature” and our universe. If individuals, communities, organizations, agencies and nations continue to destroy the environment, all humanity will reap and suffer, as is happening now, from the consequences of pollution, loss of biodiversity, desertification, deforestation and climate change.

Other empowering values and principles of Buddhist teachings that complement the vision and practice of “sustainable development” include compassion and love or loving-kindness (King, 2009; Chappell, 2000; Thich Naht Hanh, 2010). They call on Buddhists to feel and enact a deep sense of compassion and loving-kindness towards all other beings and parts of the universe. Not only should human beings act compassionately and lovingly towards all other species, including protecting biodiversity and avoiding harmful, inhumane or violent treatment of other sentient beings, but we are also moved by our compassion and loving-kindness to feel the same suffering of others, near or far, affected by unsustainable actions (e.g., human-made ecological destruction; cruelty to animals, wars and militarization which also negatively affect the environment, etc). This empathy arising from compassion and loving-kindness, motivates engaged Buddhists to act in ways that help alleviate or overcome the suffering, especially via actions designed to address the root causes of the ecological

crisis. In the Mahayana tradition, the *Bodhisattva* vow provides another empowering catalyst for selfless and virtuous action to help all other beings overcome suffering, including that arising from ecological destruction (Kornfield, 2009: 352-366). Furthermore, the Buddha’s firm teaching on non-harming and non-killing that “violence cannot be ceased by violence” reminds Buddhists to seek personal and social transformation for sustainable futures using nonviolent means.

Thirdly and critically, the Buddha’s core teaching of the Four Noble Truths emphasizes the necessity to overcome attachments or cravings, such as greed, ill-will and delusion, which, if not transcended, fuel a continuing cycle of “suffering”. This insight is most relevant to the problem of an unsustainable paradigm of “development” and “progress” reflected in the dominant over-consumerist and over-materialist economic, social and cultural order. As the Siamese engaged Buddhist, Sulak Sivaraksa (2009), and his colleagues in the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and engaged analysts like Ken Jones (2003), David Loy (2002) and Kaza (2010) have emphasized, this aggressive and limitless drive for narrowly defined economic growth, profit-maximization, and unfettered competition, has accelerated environmental destruction, widening rich-poor gaps within and across nations, and human suffering and violations of human rights to basic needs and dignities. In this regard, too many large and powerful transnational corporations, backed by home nations and facilitated by recipient governments and local elites, have aggravated unsustainable exploitation of human and natural resources which contradicts principles of “sustainable development” (Shiva, 2005; Madeley, 2008). Psychologically, psychically and culturally, especially in industrialized North societies and affluent circles in South nations, such attachment to insatiable consumer “wants” and “brands” can be “met” only by more extensive and intensive environmental depletion, while a majority of humanity suffers from a lack of basic needs. In

turn, this craving for more and more in an endless cycle will self-impose an overwhelming barrier towards “enlightenment” or nirvana.

Inspired by these various values and principles integral to Buddhist philosophy and ethics, engaged practitioners worldwide have therefore actively participated in a range of social, political, and economic initiatives, programmes or campaigns that help to promote “sustainable development” and education for sustainable development. In Asia, for example, forest monks in Thailand have mobilized the rural poor who have suffered from the effects of destructive logging to engage in “tree ordination” ceremonies to protect their remaining forests (King, 2000: 130-135). Sulak Sivaraksa, the Siamese engaged Buddhist lay leader, has tirelessly advocated for a Buddhist economics based on wisdom, compassion, sustainable fulfillment of basic needs for all, environmental protection and spiritual cultivation. Several Thai NGOs and Asian peoples’ networks, which includes representatives of other diverse faiths and cultures, apply engaged Buddhism and other faith principles to educate and catalyze marginalized rural and urban peoples to challenge dominant economic and globalization policies rooted in structural violence and pursue alternative people-centred just and sustainable development.

Likewise, the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka founded by A.T. Ariyaratne and presently co-ordinated by Vinya Ariyaratne, has, for several decades, integrated sustainability values and practices in its village development programmes (Jones, 2003: 185-189). In its post-tsunami disaster recovery work, the Sarvodaya Shanti Sena (Peace Brigades) engaged affected villages in inter alia ecological rehabilitation and education projects (Ariyaratne, n.d.). The Soka Gakkai International community that began in Japan has also contributed much to education and strategies for sustainable development.

In North America, as Kaza (2000) has usefully summarized, a growing number of engaged Buddhist individuals and faith and lay communities or organizations have applied Buddhist values and principles to environmental activism. Advocacy and campaigns include nonviolent education and action to protect old growth forests, humane treatment of animals (including commercial farms), the nuclear waste guardianship initiative mobilized by Joanna Macy, centres and retreats promoting vegetarianism, sustainable management of land and water resources, meditation, and other eco-social activities that synergize engaged Buddhist teachings with deep ecology principles.

At the core of these engaged Buddhist initiatives is clearly an affirmation that “development” needs to be mindful of the goal and processes of inner cultivation that transcends attachment to or craving for unlimited possessions. In recent years, this perspective has been further elaborated by the “Gross National Happiness” movement that was inspired by Bhutan’s attempt to transform orthodox economic indicators such as GNP in directions that are more consistent with sustainable development principles (King Khesar, 2008).

An increasingly visible dimension of engaged Buddhism also lies in the active participation of its practitioners in the growing interfaith dialogue movement worldwide. Consistent with the Buddha’s teachings of non-discrimination and loving-kindness towards all beings, Buddhists are called upon to show profound respect of other faiths and to engage in peaceful and harmonious dialogue that deepens mutual understanding and solidarity. Through local and global interfaith and interreligious movements and networks, such as Religions for Peace, the Parliament of the World’s Religions and United Religions International, engaged Buddhists and followers of diverse other faiths have affirmed their sharing of common “green” values and principles. In its formative years, the Multi-faith Centre at Griffith University in Australia helped to bring together faith communities and leaders at national, regional

and international levels in dialogues and solidarity actions including the theme of “sustainable development” and sustainable futures (Toh & Cawagas, 2006). This affirmation in turn has been transformed into joint action for sustainable futures, such as the Alliance for Religions and Conservation, and in recent years, working together to address urgent ecological problems like climate change (Toh & Cawagas, 2010a). In this regard, at the 2009 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Melbourne, Australia, engaged Buddhists played a major role in organizing interfaith dialogues on climate change culminating in a petition mural signed by Parliament delegates that was then brought to the global climate change summit in Copenhagen.

Moreover, as a peace educator endeavoring to integrate engaged Buddhist values and principles and complementary sustainability ideas and practices from other diverse faiths and cultures as well as global initiatives such as the Earth Charter, I have also been mindful of the need to practice appropriate pedagogies (Toh, 2004). I share with educators for sustainable development a firm commitment to non-banking, creative, participatory and dialogical teaching-learning strategies to develop a deep understanding of the root causes of unsustainable “development” accompanied by critical empowerment for individual and social action to build sustainable futures. Hence, as this brief review has shown, while engaged Buddhist values, principles and practices can contribute insights, experiences and role-models relevant to ESD, the pedagogical tools of ESD (Fien, 2002) and other transformative fields of education (e.g., peace education, human rights education, development education, intercultural education, etc.) (Toh & Cawagas, 2010b) will also be very helpful for engaged Buddhists building a “greener” world. Action to save the planet and humanity will not be effective and sustainable unless grounded in mindful understanding and analysis arising from critical and empowering educational processes.

Although a positive and hopeful perspective has been presented in this exploration of engaged Buddhism’s contributions to “sustainable development” and ESD, a concluding caveat is in order. Buddhist teachings and wisdom have always reminded its practitioners to exercise the value of humility and self-criticism, since the process of cultivation towards “enlightenment” is full of challenges and barriers. For example, Buddhist individuals, denominations, communities and organizations will need to be constantly vigilant, introspective and self-interrogating in terms of their own “sustainability” practices, conduct and priorities. This self-criticism extends across a range of dimensions, including infrastructure (temples, monasteries and building impact on the environment, etc.), energy-use policies, recycling, willingness and courage to speak out openly about unsustainable and environmentally destructive “development” programmes and projects, counseling followers to rethink consumerism and the integration of ESD in the faith formation of monks, nuns and lay Buddhists. On his deathbed, the Buddha’s final words of advice to his disciples, exhorted them to go forth and seek “salvation” with diligence. In the contemporary context, as the ecological crisis deepens, threatening the very survival of humanity and planet Earth, this advice surely includes a profound appeal to diligently educate for and build a sustainable, compassionate and loving world.



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# A Positive Role for Humanity: SGI's Approach to Education for Sustainable Development

Nobuyuki Asai

Nobuyuki Asai (Japan) is Programme Coordinator of Peace Affairs of Soka Gakkai International. He started to work in the headquarters of Soka Gakkai in 1999, participating that year in the Seoul International Conference of NGOs. By 2005, he was National Vice Chief of the student division of Soka Gakkai, mainly in charge of its social engagement initiatives. Since 2009, he has been coordinating NGO activities of Soka Gakkai International, mainly covering issues of sustainable development, and peace and disarmament.

The linkages between Buddhist thought in general - and SGI's values in particular - and the concept of sustainable development are many. Our commitment to this cause is heartfelt and ongoing, as is evidenced by SGI's consistent involvement in awareness-raising on environmental issues, our history of participation in the Earth Charter movement and our track record of practical grassroots action.

Buddhist concepts related to sustainable development include:

## **1. Reverence for and faith in the interconnectedness of all life**

As a starting point for our commitment, reverence for all life is one of the fundamental values that Buddhism embraces. The principle of dependent origination further stresses a dynamic interdependence linking all life in a web of interconnection.

Buddhism teaches that we need to focus on achieving harmony in three categories of relationships: those between humans and nature, those between human beings, and the relationship with oneself, our "inner universe." We consider all these entities to be interconnected on the deepest

dimension, using the word *funi* to express the idea that they are "two but not two," separate but also inextricably linked and interdependent.

Nichiren, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese monk who founded the school of Buddhism that SGI members follow, stated: "If the minds of the people are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure and impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds." And SGI President Daisaku Ikeda expressed the same point in a 1990 proposal on the environment: "The external desertification of the planet corresponds precisely with the spiritual desertification of human life."

Based on these concepts Buddhists have strived to live harmonious lives with others, the natural world and themselves since ancient times.

## **2. Cause and effect**

The concept of cause and effect in Buddhism includes both the physical and the unseen or spiritual aspects of life. It can be said that this concept represents interconnectedness among phenomena across the dimension of time.

This naturally leads us to realize that our present actions have a profound impact on future lives, and



that we should live in a sustainable way. If we make destructive causes, not only will future generations not be able to live happily, but we will cause harm to our own life.

Most crucially, however, this teaching stresses that the present moment provides the pivotal opportunity for positive change. A Buddhist text, the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra, states: "If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present."

### **3. Desire, attachment and greed**

So how does Buddhism view development? For many, Buddhism is associated with asceticism and the attempt to eliminate desire and sever all attachments. However, the perspective of Nichiren Buddhism is that the physical and spiritual dimensions of life are ultimately inseparable. Humans are justified in seeking living standards which provide for basic needs in order to alleviate human suffering (consonant with the Buddhist value of compassion) and to open to everyone the concrete experience of dignity (the value of respect for the inherent dignity of life).

Of course, untrammelled desire, or greed, cannot lead to sustainable development. In Buddhism, greed is considered to be one of "three poisons" which are the fundamental sources of human anguish and suffering.

Buddhism teaches that we should not be enslaved by our personal desires, but should direct and transform them toward a more inclusive desire, say, for the happiness of one's community and the broader community of life. In this light, desires can be a vital stimulus for creating positive value.

A redirection of desires can be realized through individual spiritual development and societal

adoption of a more balanced set of values, which stress the cultural, social and spiritual aspects of life alongside the economic and material.

In this regard, we can find inspiration and important wisdom in the following phrase in the Preamble of the Earth Charter: "We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more."

Additional concepts pertaining to sustainable development and ESD emphasized within SGI which are relevant here:

### **1. The legacy of Soka Gakkai founder Tsunesaburo Makiguchi**

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) was a geographer and educator who based his radical teaching methods on close study of the relationships between people and their immediate environment. He stressed that individuals should be aware of three levels of citizenship: our local roots and commitments; our sense of belonging to a national community; and an appreciation of the fact that the world is ultimately the stage on which we live our lives. He was an early supporter of the idea of global citizenship. At a time when Japan's education system was being used to mold obedient servants of the state, Makiguchi took a dramatically different view—that education should be learner-centered and focused on empowerment and the fulfillment and happiness of children.

The aim of education is not to transfer knowledge; it is to guide the learning process, to equip the learner with the methods of research. It is not the piecemeal merchandizing of information; it is to enable the acquisition of the methods for learning on one's own; it is the provision of keys to unlock the vault of knowledge. Empowerment is at the heart of successful ESD, and we see Makiguchi's approach to education as an important resource in this regard.

**2. Human revolution** While in some more extreme approaches to ecology, human beings are perceived as unwelcome parasites causing nothing but damage to the Earth and other forms of life, SGI's outlook is that responsible and awakened human beings committed to creating positive value are in fact the most promising protagonists of change.

In the Buddhist view, human beings have the potential to engage in self-aware compassionate action (the ideal of the bodhisattva) devoted to the well-being of others. In concrete terms this translates into developing a sense of solidarity and caring for all the inhabitants of Earth, as well as a responsibility to future generations of the broader community of life. For SGI Buddhists, the process of developing this kind of expanded awareness and commitment is integral to our spiritual and religious practice. Further, we are confident that the positive ripple effects of such inner change, a "human revolution" in a single individual, know no bounds.

It is the responsibility of humanity to make efforts toward sustainable living, as our own lives are supported by each other and myriad other forms of life. Without an attitude of appreciation, such as that found among the indigenous peoples of the world, it is impossible for human beings to live sustainably.

### 3. Optimism

Unfortunately, environmental education can induce a sense of disempowerment and despair because negative aspects are often emphasized and the scale of the topic is so huge and complex. In contrast, SGI's approach stresses our intimate connection to environmental issues, the possibility of initiating positive change and the message that one person can make a difference.

Mr. Ikeda expressed this in his 2002 proposal on ESD, "The Global Challenge of Empowerment":

Education should encourage understanding of the ways that environmental problems intimately connect to our daily lives. Education must also inspire the faith that each of us has both the power and the responsibility to effect positive change on a global scale.

### 4. Philosophy of dialogue

Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, and Nichiren both used dialogue as a teaching method. Within SGI, dialogue is seen as the key to human transformation and learning. Dialogue requires respect for one's counterpart and opening oneself to new ideas and perspectives. Mr. Ikeda has modeled dialogue himself, and the basic activity of SGI around the world is a local level grassroots "discussion meeting," where people encounter others in their local community and encourage each other toward greater achievement and fulfillment.

Dialogue has also specifically been used as a framework for beginning to address issues of sustainability and related values. One SGI member in the US took the pioneering step of initiating "Earth Charter Dinner Dialogues," and another in Italy developed "Talk Shows" based on the framework of the Earth Charter where young people presented their concerns directly to local politicians.

## Educating and Communicating about Sustainable Development in SGI

### 1. "Learn, Reflect, Empower" formula

In order to promote education for sustainable development, Mr. Ikeda advocated this three-point formula in his proposal launched on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002:

**Learn:** Everything starts from grasping basic facts. In particular, in the context of sustainable development, we need to learn to empathetically

understand the realities of those who suffer, embracing their pain as our own and conscious of our interconnectedness.

**Reflect:** Together with the provision of accurate information, it's crucial that the ethical values we share are clarified. Information and knowledge alone can leave people wondering what this all means to them, and without a clear sense of what concrete steps they can take.

**Empower:** Thirdly, people must be empowered with courage and hope if they are to take those first concrete steps.

## **2. Commitment to education and awareness-raising**

SGI has been engaged in a range of educational activities, often using the Earth Charter as a tool and following the "Learn, Reflect, Empower" formula. In all activities, dialogue - which provides opportunities for learning, reflection and empowerment - is encouraged.

One groundbreaking challenge by SGI was initiation of the proposal for the establishment of an international decade of education for sustainable development, in discussion with NGOs in Japan, on the occasion of WSSD in 2002. Our intention was that the issue of sustainable development be made accessible to ordinary people, particularly through informal education. The proposal was supported by other NGOs, and subsequently adopted by the Japanese government, eventually leading to its adoption by the UN General Assembly and the implementation of the Decade since 2005.

To promote the Decade, and to empower ordinary people, we created an awareness-raising exhibition together with the Earth Charter Initiative titled "Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential" and showed this in 26 countries.

In 2010, on the 10th anniversary of the Earth Charter,

this was revised to create the "Seeds of Hope: Visions of sustainability, steps toward change" exhibition. Within a year, this had already been shown in more than 10 countries.

The exhibition aims to provide a positive message without glossing over difficult realities. It stresses how all religions have messages relating to interconnectedness, environmental protection and sustainability, featuring quotes from different traditions. It also stresses that sustainability is holistic, and not just about the environment.

Earlier, in 2002, we supported the creation of the educational film "A Quiet Revolution," featuring three dramatic case studies of how individuals have contributed to solving local environmental problems.

All these tools are designed to follow the "Learn, Reflect, Empower" formula described above, presenting not only problems but also inspiration, showing their connection with our daily lives, and giving inspirational examples of how one empowered and aware individual can initiate change.

## **3. Participation in the Earth Charter Initiative**

In our awareness-raising activities, we have consistently been using the Earth Charter as a tool for dialogue, as it helps bridge gaps of religion or culture. It enables us to reach out to and communicate with other religious groups on common ground where the emphasis is on what concerns we share rather than what doctrinal differences might separate us.

Mr. Ikeda has consistently promoted the Charter, stating:

*The Earth Charter is not limited in its concerns to environmental issues but contains important language related to social and economic justice, democracy, nonviolence and peace. In this sense, it is*

*a comprehensive statement of the norms and values required for effective global governance. It may be considered a guideline for humanity in the twenty-first century.*

The Earth Charter matches SGI's values fully and helps people reflect on their lives in profound ways. We have had consistent experience of young people especially benefiting from using the Earth Charter in this way, from Singapore to Italy and Japan. As one youth participant in such a dialogue in Malaysia said recently, "We can no longer wait for the government to commit wholeheartedly in moving toward a sustainable lifestyle. The movement has to start from the individual. This issue transcends nations; it affects humanity. Hence, we as fellow human beings, should take heed of this exhibition and 'start with one.'"

#### **4. Networking with ESD-Japan:**

To promote ESD, we have been participating in a networking organization, the Japan Council on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD-J). The 2011 general meeting was convened in Sendai, in the area devastated by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, at the end of June. The key issues included reconstruction of communities which suffered heavily or were completely destroyed by the tsunami. The Japanese are painfully aware of the lesson that natural disasters cannot be avoided, and that we have to continue to find ways to live in such an environment. Several NGOs in Japan have become involved in ESD based on this experience.

#### **5. Daily activities**

In addition to these educational activities, our daily activities as a faith-based organization are also relevant. Bolstering local communities is also a part of sustainability. SGI's local Buddhist activities contribute to strengthening the bonds of people at this level, deepening their understanding of the area where they live and adding to their sense of

responsibility toward their own community. This was seen for example in relief activities after the earthquake in the Tohoku region. A number of SGI members have been playing leading roles, though some of them have lost homes and family members themselves. This can at least partly be attributed to the consistent emphasis on action for the sake of others in their regular Buddhist activities and study.

## **Conclusion**

A wide range of educational and awareness-raising activities within SGI has helped cultivate individual members' activities for SD. There are countless examples throughout the SGI network of individuals contributing to sustainability by tackling issues and needs within their local area and workplaces.

Barbara Paterson, originally from Germany, is an environmental consultant working in Namibia. She comments:

*For me, the Buddhist concept of the oneness of self and the environment and the notion that nothing can exist in isolation provide the philosophical basis for my research toward a holistic approach to fisheries management that can help bring human society back into harmony with nature.*

Enid Trevett is the founder of Action for Change in Fife, Scotland, and the key Earth Charter contact person in Scotland:

*The Earth Charter and Buddhist values are very similar in many ways; indeed the celebration slogan for the 10th anniversary of the Charter is "It starts with one." This focus on taking personal responsibility and changing ourselves from the inside as the starting point for change in the wider external environment is a basic tenet of Buddhism.*



## Education for Sustainable Development and Chinese Philosophical Traditions

Yunhua Liu and Alicia Constable

Ms. Yunhua Liu (China) is the Director of Shangri-la Institute for Sustainable Communities. Prior to the establishment of Shangri-la Institute in 2007, Ms. Liu served as the Director of the WWF China Education Program for over 10 years. She was a member of the International Advisory Group for the 'World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development' in 2009 and has co-authored several articles on ESD for the International Review of Education and the Journal of Education for Sustainable Development.

Alicia Constable (United Kingdom) has been working for the Shangri-la Institute for more than 3 years. She has an MSc in Development Studies from SOAS, University of London and has worked in the areas of education and development in China for 7 years. She has co-authored several articles on ESD and Chinese project experiences for the International Review of Education and the Journal of Education for Sustainable Development.

The three main faiths or traditional philosophies of China include **Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism**. In China these faiths have intermingled for centuries and each has influenced the others, thereby creating a uniquely Chinese faith or traditional philosophy. The three philosophies commonly emphasize respect for others, social harmony, and interconnectedness with nature and the earth, which are all in line with the concept and purpose of sustainable development. Another fundamental concept is that of the collective effort, rather than emphasis on the individual, which adds strength to the call of sustainable development for global responsibility and global action. All 3 philosophies emphasize the importance of frugality and refraining from greed; i.e. 'being more instead of having more', which is also essential for sustainability. Learning and acquiring knowledge for everyone's benefit is also significant in traditional Chinese philosophy, and a must for sustainable development: "I am not one who was born with

knowledge, but...works hard to seek knowledge." "There should be education for everyone without distinction." (Ding, 2007)

Harmony is the key tenet in Chinese philosophy and Chinese thought. Harmony with the universe and the natural environment, harmony between humans and nature, and harmony between people are all stressed in the ancient Chinese classics. To value harmony is to effectively avoid extreme attitudes and confrontational actions, to reduce the conflicts between people and promote stability. (Li, 2009) Confucianism teaches about self-cultivation to achieve harmony within oneself, as a prerequisite for harmony within one's family, with others, nature and the whole world. Confucius said, "The gentleman aims at harmony, and not at uniformity. The mean man aims at uniformity and not at harmony." (Ding, 2007) Daoism encourages a deep appreciation of nature, and the cultivation of the art of living in harmonious balance with nature and

other people, (Gu, 2008, Cai, 2006) while Buddhism advocates harmony through compassion for all sentient beings and non-violence.

Harmony with nature is also explicitly outlined, and is in line with the respect for the earth and protection of nature necessary for sustainable development. Feng shui (or Chinese Geomancy), which stems from Confucianism, emphasizes the power of certain places, the value of their preservation and the need to maintain harmony with these landscapes. There are also many positive references to the natural environment, and comparisons of nature with positive human traits. For example: "those who are wise, being active, flexible and wide-ranging, are thought to have a natural correspondence with and delight in flowing water, while those who are jen, "perfectly good," being still, stable and immovable are thought to have a natural correspondence with and delight in mountains." (Ivanhoe, 1998)

Daoism emphasizes being at one with nature, in an interconnected harmonious state. Similarly to Confucianism, Daoism emphasizes respect for nature, and the ways in which we can learn from nature for our own benefit: "The perfect goodness is like water. Water approaches all things, instead of contending with them. It prefers to dwell where no one would like to stay; Hence it comes close to Tao (Dao). A man of perfect goodness chooses a place to dwell as water, He has a heart as deep as water, He offers friendship as tender as water, He speaks as sincerely as water, He rules a state as orderly as water. He does a thing properly as water, He takes action as timely as water. Like water, he never contends with others, So he never commits a mistake." (Gu, 2008)

This deep respect for nature is illustrated by the Daoist respect and emphasis on the value of wild places, which are protected. Both Daoism and Buddhism practice the worshipping of sacred mountains and lakes, and the taboo of polluting or damaging such places.

Buddhism regards nature as sacred and as a source of wisdom and peace and teaches its adherents to cultivate a way of life that is in harmony with the natural world (Liu, 2002).

In ancient Imperial China, harmony with nature was a main principle of the Imperial Rites, a set of rituals which laid out responsibilities to be carried out by the government and by individuals. The Imperial Rites predate Confucius, but later became part of the organized religion which he recommended, which emphasized the value of the soil, sun, moon and earth, as highlighted by the temples of the same name in Beijing.

Frugality is central to traditional Chinese philosophy. Daoists practice frugality, and refrain from over-indulgence or over-use because they believe it will eventually result in defeat or failure: "Too much amassment leads to great loss; Knowing contentment avoids disgrace; Knowing when to stop avoids danger; Thus one can be long in safety." (Gu, 2008)

Buddhism advocates living simply and moderation in the acquisition of material things. A central tenet of Buddhist teachings is the 3 poisons of human suffering, which include greed, anger and ignorance. Buddhist teachings explain that because of our connectedness, these personal poisons are reflected in our society. Greed, for example, is reflected in the destruction of the environment. [1]

Confucianism also looks at this through the perspective of selfishness. For example, though Confucianism emphasizes self-cultivation, it is with the explicit intention of helping others: "Cultivate yourself, put your family in order, run the local government well, and bring peace to the entire country". (Zhou, 2006)



## Teaching and communicating the vision of sustainable development

Many of the traditions and philosophies of China, including indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, pass on and teach about the values and vision of sustainable development. For example, this may be through the depiction of nature as sacred, by emphasizing respect for nature, and the need to learn from and with nature and from each other, all of which are directly linked to the vision of sustainable development. This may form an explicit visioning exercise of sustainable development, as interpreted through individual faiths, or it may be an expression of beliefs within that faith, which correlate to sustainable development.

For example the picture below is a Thangka painting done by young monks at Dongzhulin Monastery in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan. It was painted in traditional style, as a vision of local sustainable development.

In many of China's traditional faith systems, teaching and communicating these beliefs or visions takes the form of storytelling, singing and dancing, art, rituals (e.g. the worship of trees, mountains and lakes), and protection of sacred animals (such as the Black-necked Crane), as well as through books and oral histories which still heavily draw on proverbs and the philosophy of ancient sages.

Differences also exist in the way that the different traditional Chinese philosophies teach about key concepts such as harmony. For example, Confucianism provides a moral code for engagement in the world of human affairs, while Buddhism encourages detachment from that material world, with the exercise of compassion as the main engagement.

## Approaches to ESD and using the Earth Charter

The Shangri-la Institute for Sustainable Communities (SISC) has been working with local communities in different parts of China to facilitate ESD by reconnecting with local culture for more than 14 years. ESD and social learning are the main mechanisms employed for sustainable community development, with an emphasis on combining modern knowledge and science with traditional values, Indigenous Knowledge and local practices.

For example communities in Shangri-la, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, have used the Earth Charter as a framework, linking it to their own knowledge and local Buddhist beliefs to create a community development plan, which involves the creation of a Community Nature Reserve. Students and teachers participating in the Water School for a Living Yangtze in Mianyang, Sichuan have been using the traditional Daoist deep respect for water





as a way to explain the importance of sustainable water resource management to local communities. In Shanghai, schools and communities have revived Confucian ideas about harmony with the environment to realign local values with global concepts of ESD.

Understanding the links of global principles with local values, culture and belief systems can strengthen the impact of the Earth Charter and the process of ESD by helping communities to relate these global values to their daily lives. Such an approach is more likely to result in changes in thought and action that are conducive to Sustainable Development. In this way, the Earth Charter can be used as a framework for linking the local and the global. It can be added to and adapted for local interventions, to translate global principles into local actions, appropriate for the local context.

## Contributing to the transition to a sustainable world

In contrast to many Western concepts, the importance of the collective rather than the individual is central to China's traditional philosophies. If we are to be successful in transitioning to a sustainable world, this is something that we all need to move towards: collective responsibilities, collective wisdom and collective action.

Confucianism states that personal achievement and learning is measured by his or her contribution to others (e.g. to family, community, society, the rest of nature and the universe) as the "Four To's" by Zhang Zhai from the Song dynasty (960–1279) illustrates:



"To cultivate spirituality in society, to establish the Tao (the way) for human beings, to restore the lost teachings of the past sages, and to build a peaceful world for future generations."

(Gong, 1994<sup>36</sup>)

Sustainable development and environmental protection is a common responsibility. As such, we need to find a balance between "individual rights and common responsibilities" (Lubbers et al, 2008) if we are to achieve sustainable development. The Earth Charter provides a useful tool for discussion of this theme:

"...the Earth Charter tries to overcome exaggerated individualism and dangerous short-term thinking..." (Lubbers et al, 2008)

In this regard a lot can be learned from traditional Chinese teachings, which as we have seen emphasize the collective, and individual learning for the good of the collective. By taking a balanced approach between the two whereby individuals are given opportunities to fulfill their potential and nurture the

36. This text has been re-translated from the original Chinese by the authors.

knowledge, skills and values needed to become an informed, responsible, active and capable citizen of the earth, whilst at the same time keeping a global perspective and contributing to collective learning and action, ESD can be facilitated.

## Contributing to ESD efforts worldwide

Many of the principles that the ESD and the Earth Charter advocate are echoed in traditional Chinese philosophy and teachings. More awareness of this would facilitate global understanding and strengthen calls for frugality and collective action. For example, this could include the inclusion of Thangka paintings and calligraphy of Chinese wisdom on posters depicting ESD around the world. Mindfulness, which is also emphasized in Chinese wisdom, and key in many traditional art forms such as the tea ceremony, calligraphy, painting, Tai Qi and Qi Gong can be a useful tool for Sustainable Development, since it can focus attention on the source of resources and their value.

The union of different faiths and philosophies within China can also offer great wisdom to ESD globally, particularly in demonstrating how different perspectives and ideas can work harmoniously together, and strengthen and enrich existing knowledge, skills and values.

Tools that contribute to education reform through the mainstreaming of ESD, and the promotion of place-based learning are an important contribution to the linkage of the local with the global. Dialogue between people from different backgrounds and faiths can promote understanding and social harmony. The Earth Charter is a very effective tool. As a spiritual humanism, Confucianism's project for human flourishing involves four dimensions: self, community, Earth, and Heaven. Character building, the primary purpose of Confucian moral education, begins with self-cultivation. But education is more

to the linkage of the local with the global. Dialogue between people from different backgrounds and faiths can promote understanding and social harmony. The Earth Charter is a very effective tool for this as it provides a global ethical framework for discussion and consideration.

The communication and teaching of traditions is very important and can include things like, for example, a poster or video of different faiths or traditions and how they link or contribute to ESD. In this way the commonalities between faiths would be promoted, which would enhance a feeling of collective responsibility, and inform collective wisdom and collective action.

Although much of the Chinese traditional philosophy greatly emphasizes harmony with nature and correlates to ESD, it is worth pointing out that in China, this wisdom has not necessarily been adopted into the mainstream, and as is the case in many places, beliefs do not always translate into effective protection. (Elvin, 2004) Without these deep-rooted beliefs systems however, China's natural environment could be in a much worse situation than it is today. ESD is a powerful mechanism and platform for re-connecting with traditional Chinese culture and philosophy in order to facilitate the collective wisdom and action required for sustainable development, in China and beyond.

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## Ecological Implications of Confucian Humanism

Tu Weiming

Tu Weiming, (China) Lifetime Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University and Research Professor and Senior Fellow of Asia Center at Harvard University. Tu is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1988-) and a tutelary member of the Institute of International Philosophy (2010-). Tu is the author of *Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yangming's Youth, and the Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*.

As a spiritual humanism, Confucianism's project for human flourishing involves four dimensions: self, community, Earth, and Heaven. Character building, the primary purpose of Confucian moral education, begins with self-cultivation. But education is more than the mere acquisition of knowledge or the internationalization of skills. It is a holistic way of learning to be human. In Confucian terms, such learning is defined as "learning for the sake of the self," "the learning of the heart-mind and nature," or "learning to be a profound person."

It is misleading, however, to assume that Confucian learning is a quest for individual happiness or inner spirituality. Rather, far from being "individualistic," Confucian learning is a communal act. The self is never an isolated individual but a center of relationships.

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self," "the learning of the heart-mind and nature," or "learning to be a profound person." It is misleading, however, to assume that Confucian learning is a quest for individual happiness or inner spirituality. Rather, far from being "individualistic," Confucian learning is a communal act. The self is never an isolated individual but a center of relationships. As the center, the self is independent and autonomous. Such independence and autonomy are predicated on the dignity of the person as an internal value rather than as a socially constructed reality. At the same time, the self as a center of relationships is inevitably interconnected with an ever-expanding network of human-relatedness.

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Community is never separate from the self. To paraphrase William James, without the creativity of the centered self, community stagnates and without the sympathetic resonance of the community, true

selfhood fades away.<sup>37</sup> Community in Confucian humanism is variously understood as family, village, country, world, and cosmos. Self-realization as a communal act presupposes a personal commitment for harmonizing the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world. The full realization of personhood entails the real possibility of transcending selfishness, nepotism, parochialism, nationalism, and anthropocentrism. These underlying paradoxes are clues for understanding the subtleties of Confucian moral reasoning. An essential task of self-cultivation is to overcome selfishness. The maintenance of harmony in the family requires that we overcome nepotistic attachments that are pursued at the expense of being open to other relationships. Communal solidarity is based on our ability to recognize the meaningful existence of other communities. Thus, patriotism is at odds with chauvinistic nationalism. Indeed, further following the trajectory of this line of thinking, we must transcend anthropocentrism to bring the self-realization of humanity to fruition.<sup>38</sup> An obvious illustration of this style of moral reasoning in the Confucian classical text is found in the opening section of the Great Learning, declaring that self-cultivation, which is rooted in the inner experience of personal authenticity, is open to family, state, and all under Heaven.<sup>39</sup> This project of human flourishing definitely involves the human community as a whole. The interplay between the "inner self" and the "outer community" is essential to realize the true identity of personal authenticity and relationality. In other words, deep subjectivity is not only compatible with but also inseparable

37 William James motto as prominently displayed in the lobby of William James Hall at Harvard University reads: "Without the impulse of the the individual community stagnates without the sympathy of the community Individual impulse fades away." I have yet to identify the quotation.

38. For a fuller exploration of the interplay between individuality and sociality, see Tu Weiming, *Sociality, Individuality and anthropocosmic Vision in Confucian Humanism* in Tu Weiming, *The Gobar Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in cultural China* (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2010), pp. 325-341.

39. Daxue (the Great Learning), see Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 87.

from broad sociality. Indeed, the assumptive reason for this is precisely because subjectivity and sociality are two constituent dimensions of human self-realization. This underscores the earlier reference to William James' assertion that individual creativity and communal sympathy are mutually dependent. Such a mode of thinking definitely rejects Richard Rorty's idiosyncratic insistence that the need for personal happiness and the demand for social services are not only in conflict but are also incompatible. Although Confucians recognize that there are always some tensions between self and society, they definitely reject the exclusive dichotomist claim that the attainment of genuine selfhood requires a conscious alienation from society.

Actually, the belief that deep subjectivity and broad sociality are coterminous is based on a much broader vision of human flourishing. Human beings are self-evidently social beings. However, if they are ontologically restricted in their social relations, they may be able to transcend selfishness, parochialism, nationalism, or racism, but they can never transcend anthropocentrism. The Confucian conception of the human is not merely anthropological but it is also anthropocosmic. In addition to self and society, a third dimension, namely "nature," must be included as well. Human beings are both naturalistic and socialistic. Implicit in the declaration of the Great Learning that self-cultivation involves regulation of the family, governance of the state, and peace of the world is the message of cosmic harmony.

This idea is fully enunciated in another of the other Four Books, *Centrality and Commonality* (the Doctrine of the Mean).<sup>40</sup> Strictly speaking, the Way of the Great Learning is anthropocosmic rather than anthropological, not to mention anthropocentric. As clearly stated, the purpose of this kind of learning is "to illuminate the illuminating virtue." The illuminating virtue is the virtue that emanates

40. Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean). See Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (State University of New York Press, 1989).

from the Heavenly-endowed human nature. To use an expedient Christian analogy, the divinity in the human as endowed by God entails self-illumination. Yet, contrary to Christian theology, in Confucian philosophy this self-illuminating virtue, although endowed by God, is distinctively human to the extent that its further illumination to enable the inner divinity to be a sustained presence in the lifeworld cannot depend on God's continuous grace. It must be maintained by persistent human effort.

Surely, it is painfully difficult to regulate the family, govern the state, and bring perpetual peace to the world. The harsh reality of dysfunctional families, failed states, and world disorder makes it abundantly clear that the state of the human is in crisis. Yet, Confucians insist that the underlying reason for this deplorable situation is the human incapacity to rise above a myopic anthropocentric point of view. Self-cultivation, the root of individual and communal efforts to enable a good life both for us and for future generations, is a dynamic process rather than a static structure. It is a process of deepening subjectivity. Because selfhood and sociality are coterminous, deepening subjectivity entails broadening sociality. The deepened subjectivity and the broadened sociality depend on a transcendent vision that sees them as integral parts of ultimate human flourishing. Subjectivity, no matter how deep, and sociality, no matter how broad, if they are confined to the limited and limiting lifeworld or to the secular world, are insufficient to accommodate the full-realization of humanity. The Confucian idea of the "unity of Heaven and Man" (referring to ren in a gender-neutral sense of the human) demonstrates precisely that the highest ideal of learning to be human must go beyond the anthropological world and embrace the universe as a whole.

The line of reasoning in the aforementioned Centrality and Commonality is straightforward: human beings can take part in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, thereby

forming a trinity with Heaven and Earth.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, human beings are observers, appreciators, participants, and co-creators of the cosmic process. Strictly speaking, they are neither creatures nor the outcomes of evolution. To be sure, human nature is endowed by Heaven and human beings have evolved genetically from vital energy (qi), life (sheng), and consciousness (zhi)<sup>42</sup>, but the transformation of human nature cannot be attributed to Heaven's will and the uniqueness of being human cannot be reduced to the characteristics of animals, plants, and rocks. Indeed, the advent of the human is significant, both anthropologically and cosmologically. Heaven so conceived is omnipresent and omniscient, but it definitely is not omnipotent. Heaven is creativity in itself. Human beings should emulate Heaven to enhance their own creativity.

Implicit in human creativity is the human potential for destructiveness. For Confucians, human beings are thoroughly responsible for both their creativity and their destructiveness. Hence, human beings must not blame Heaven for dysfunctional families, failed states, or world disorder. Human beings cannot find an excuse in their Heavenly-endowed nature for man-made disasters. As Confucians make explicit, human beings can survive virtually all natural calamities. The ability of the Sage-King Yu to transform the Flood into an elaborate transportation and irrigation system amply demonstrates that effective leadership enriched by scientific knowledge, rationality, compassion, and the spirit of sacrifice can mobilize human beings to construct awe-inspiring economic institutions, political structures, social organizations, and semiotic systems. At the same time, human beings are also capable of destroying not only themselves, but also the animal world, life forms, and the earth. Understandably, the Confucians warned

41. Ibid., p. 77.

42. This evolutionary insight is from the great Confucian thinker Xunzi. It is predicated on the assumption that the most basic qi "stuff" that constitutes the universe is neither matter or spirit but the vital energy which is by definition both materialistic and spiritual. The idea of zhi, rendered here as consciousness, also conveys sensations, sentiments and feelings.

that human beings can survive all calamities except those that are manmade.

The time is ripe for us to rethink the human in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are in need of a comprehensive spiritual humanism that is capable of integrating the four inseparable dimensions of human flourishing: self, community, Earth, and Heaven. As Ewert Cousins wisely remarked, the Earth is our prophet. Those who are musical to the sound of the Earth will guide us on to a new path of survival. Furthermore, there is a great deal that humans seasoned in a modernistic mentality can learn from indigenous traditions.

Actually, all spiritual traditions must undergo a profound transformation to respond to the new human condition occasioned by the contemporary ecological crisis. No religious leader can afford to focus on the sacredness of the Kingdom of God at the expense of the secular world or the loftiness of the Pure Land at the expense of This Shore, the “red dust.” The cultivation of a spirit of caring for the earth is widely recognized as a universal principle of global citizenship. Therefore, it is imperative that all citizens of the world take part in an ongoing dialogue among civilizations to facilitate this vision.