

General overview

Crisis of values

This subfield is founded on the understanding that, in the words of Iranian-American philosopher [Seyyed Hossein Nasr](#) , "the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values," and that religions, being a primary source of values in any culture, are thus implicated in the decisions humans make regarding the [environment](#) .

Burden of guilt

Historian [Lynn White, Jr.](#) first made the argument in a 1966 lecture before the [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) , subsequently published in the journal *Science* , that [Western Christianity](#) , having de-sacralized and instrumentalized nature to human ends, bears a substantial "burden of guilt" for the contemporary environmental crisis. White's essay stimulated a flurry of responses, ranging from defenses of Christianity to qualified admissions to complete agreement with his analysis.

Eastern religions and indigenous peoples

Some proposed that [Eastern religions](#) , as well as those of [indigenous peoples](#) , neo-pagans, and others, offered more [eco-friendly worldviews](#) than Christianity. A third, more obscure camp, argued that while White's theory was indeed correct, this was actually a benefit to society, and that thinning the populations of weaker plant and animal species via environmental destruction would lead to the [evolution](#) of stronger, more productive creatures. See [Kaitiaki](#) in [Māori religion](#) .

Religions and Conservation

In September 1986 the [World Wide Fund for Nature](#) (WWF) celebrated its 25th anniversary by bringing together authorities from five major world religions to declare how the teachings of their

faith leads each of them to care for nature. The event was instigated by WWF International President HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and took place over two days in the Italian town of [Assisi](#), chosen for its association with St Francis of Assisi the Catholic saint of ecology. What resulted from this unprecedented project were the [Assisi](#)

[Declarations](#)

: separate calls from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic leaders to their own faithful concerning their spiritual relationship with nature and sacred duty to care for it.

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After the Assisi event WWF continued to work with religious advisors to support the faiths in developing a wide variety of conservation projects through what was known as the Network of Religions and Conservation. By 1995 four more faiths - Baha'i, Daoism, Jainism and Sikhism - had produced declarations to accompany the original five and, with representatives of all nine religions, Prince Philip launched the [Alliance of Religions and Conservation](#), an independent NGO based in the UK and committed to linking the faith worlds of the major religions with the more secular worlds of conservation and ecology in the cause of conservation and sustainability.

Given the global reach of religions and their social, cultural and political influence in many parts of the world the message that conservation of the natural world was a fundamental element of faith was seen to have a tremendous potential significance for the future of the environment. In 2011 the ARC network celebrated 25 years since the original Declarations with another conference in Assisi celebrating the thousands of faith-based projects and long-term plans for sustainability that the network has supported over the years. The event also launched the [Green Pilgrimage Network](#), in recognition of the environmental impact caused by the estimated 150 million spiritual journeys undertaken by faith followers every year.

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Starting with 12 sites representing different faith traditions in Asia, Africa and Europe the commitment is to develop attitudes, resources and practices to minimise negative environmental impact and even, if possible, harness the efforts of pilgrims to generate a positive impact instead.

Religion and ecology

By the 1990s, many scholars of religion had entered the debate and begun to generate a

substantial body of literature discussing and analyzing how nature is valued in the world's various religious systems. A landmark event was a series of ten conferences on Religion and Ecology organized by Yale University professors Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim and held at the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions from 1996 to 1998. More than 800 international scholars, religious leaders, and environmentalists participated in the conference series. The conferences concluded at the United Nations and at the American Museum of Natural History with more than 1,000 people in attendance. Papers from the conferences were published in a series of ten books (The Religions of the World and Ecology Book Series), one for each of the world's major religious traditions.

From these conferences, Tucker and Grim would form The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. The Forum has been instrumental in the creation of scholarship, in forming environmental policy, and in the greening of religion. In addition to their work with the Forum, Tucker and Grim's work continues in the *Journey of the Universe* film, book, and educational DVD series. It continues to be the largest international multireligious project of its kind.

An active Religion and Ecology group has been in existence within the American Academy of Religion since 1991, and an increasing number of universities in North America and around the world are now offering courses on religion and the environment. Recent scholarship on the field of religion and ecology can be found in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* and in reference works such as the encyclopedia *The Spirit of Sustainability*.

Religion and nature

Other landmarks in the emerging field was the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* in 2005, which was edited by [Bron Taylor](#). Taylor also led the effort to form the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, which was established in 2006, and began publishing the quarterly *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* in 2007.

Religions and the environment

Buddhism

The best asset religion offers is the moral framework by which practitioners must abide. [\[3 \]](#)

Since many environmental problems have stemmed from human activity, it follows that religion might hold some solutions to mitigating destructive patterns.

Buddhism

idealizes and emphasizes interconnection,

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thereby creating a mindset that creates a productive and cooperative relationship between humans and nature. That all actions are based on the premise of interconnection makes the Buddhist mindset affective in generating modesty, compassion, and balance among followers, which may ultimately mitigate the harm done to the environment.

One benefit of the Buddhist interconnected mindset is the inevitable humility that ensues. Because humans are entwined with natural systems, damage done upon the Earth is also harm done to humans.^[5] This realization is quite modifying to a human race that historically pillages the Earth for individual benefit. When rational humans minimize the split between humanity and nature and bridge the gaps, ^[3] only then will a mutual respect emerge in which all entities coexist rather than fight. Buddhism maintains that the reason for all suffering comes from attachment. ^[6] When release from the tight grasp humanity has on individuality and separateness occurs, then oneness and interconnection is realized. So rather than emphasizing winners and losers, humanity will understand its existence within others; this results in a modesty that ends egoic mind.

Another benefit of Buddhist practice to the environment is the compassion that drives all thinking. ^[3] When humans realize that they are all connected, harm done to another will never benefit the initiator. ^[5] Therefore, peaceful wishes for everyone and everything will ultimately benefit the initiator. Through accepting that the web of life is connected

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—if one entity benefits, all benefit

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—then the prevailing mindset encourages peaceful actions all the time. If everything depends on everything else, then only beneficial events will make life situations better. Acceptance of compassion takes training and practice, which is also encouraged by Buddhist moral conduct in the form of meditation. This habitual striving for harmony and friendship among all beings creates a more perfect relationship between humanity and nature.

Lastly, Buddhist mindset relies on taking the middle road or striving for balance. Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, spent his life searching for the outlet of human suffering, eventually concluding that a balance must be established between self-destruction and self-indulgence. [7] While modern, industrial humans emphasize economic and social aspects of life and lastly environmental aspects, this view is lopsided. [5] When human preferences are leveled with environmental preferences—giving a voice to natural systems as well as human systems—then can balance and harmony be realized.

Therefore, using this idealized and disciplined framework that Buddhism has to offer can create lasting solutions to amending the broken relationship between humanity and nature. What ensues is an ethic, rather than a short-term policy or technological fix. [5] When never-ending consumption patterns cease for the betterment of the world as a whole, then all systems will harmoniously interact in a non-abusive way.

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Without needing to adopt a new religion, just recognizing and accepting this mindset can help to heal the environmental injuries of the past.

Buddhists today are involved in spreading environmental awareness. In a meeting with the U.S Ambassador to the Republic of India Timothy J. Roemer, the [Dalai Lama](#) urged the U.S to engage China on climate change in Tibet.

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The Dalai Lama has also been part of a series on discussions organised by the

[Mind and Life Institute](#)

; a non profit organisation that specializes on the relationship between science and Buddhism.

The talks were partly about ecology, ethics and interdependence and issues on global warming were brought up

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Christianity

Main article: [Christianity and environmentalism](#)

Christianity has a historic concern for nature and the natural world. At the same time, ecological concerns operate in tension with anthropocentric values, such as the Biblical notion of human dominion over the Earth. ([Gen](#) 1:28) A broad range of Christian institutions are engaged in the [environmental movement](#) and contemporary environmental concerns.

Catholicism

Catholic activists have found support in teachings by Pope Paul VI (Octogesima Adveniens, #21) and Pope John Paul II (e.g., the encyclical Centesimus Annus, #37-38).

Eastern Orthodox

Patriarch Bartholomew I, the "first among equals" in the Eastern Orthodox Communion, has voiced support for environmentalism action along with Pope John Paul II. [\[10 \]](#)

Evangelicals

Some Evangelical groups have been an ally to environmentalists in spreading awareness on [global warming](#)

. The National Association of Evangelicals a non profit organisation are working towards encouraging lawmakers to pass a law that would put restrictions on carbon emissions in the U.S.

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Latter Day Saint movement

Mormon environmentalists find theological reasons for stewardship and conservationism through biblical and additional scriptural references including a passages from the Doctrine and Covenants: "And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion" (D&C 59:20). [\[1](#)

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[\]](#)

The

[Latter Day Saint movement](#)

has a complex relationship with environmental concerns, involving not only the religion but politics and economics.

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In terms of

[environmentally friendly](#)

policies, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has a history of utilizing elements of

conservationist policies for their meetinghouses.

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The church first placed solar panels on a church meetinghouse in the

[Tuamotu Islands](#)

in 2007.

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In 2010, the church unveiled five

[LEED](#)

certified meetinghouse prototypes that are that will be used as future meetinghouse designs around the world, the first one having been completed in 2010 in Farmington, Utah.

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Hinduism

In Hinduism, practitioners and scholars find traditional approaches to the natural environment in such concepts as dharmic ethics or prakrti (material creation), the development of [ayurveda](#) , and readings of

[vedic literature](#)

. Hindu environmental activism also may be inspired by Gandhian philosophy and practical struggles, such as the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan

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and Chipko resistance to forestry policies in Uttar Pradesh, India.

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Islam

See also: [Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science](#)

Through the tradition from the Quran and the prophets, the environment was made sacred. It is believed that God did not create the environment for a random reason, but rather a reflection of truth. One can gain profound knowledge from nature thus, human beings are to preserve it and look after it. Many chapters in the Quran, refer to the beauties of nature as well as the headings of many chapters indicating the importance of it, such as: “ The Sun”, “Dawn”, and “Morning Hours”. Thus man is God’s representative on this planet, if he is not charged with sustaining it, then at least he must not destroy it. [[20](#)]

In Islam, the concept of a [hima](#) or "inviolable zone" refers to a piece of land that has been set aside to prevent cultivation or any use other than spiritual purposes.

Judaism

Main article: [Judaism and environmentalism](#)

In Judaism, the natural world plays a central role in Jewish law, literature, and liturgical and other practices. Within the diverse arena of Jewish thought, beliefs vary widely about the human relation to the environment, though the rabbinic tradition has put Judaism primarily on an [anthropocentric](#) trajectory. However, a few contemporary Jewish thinkers and rabbis in the USA and Israel emphasized that a central belief in Judaism is that the Man (Ha Adam - האדם whose root comes from Haadama (earth) - האדמה, in Hebrew language), should keep the Earth in the same state as he received it from God, its eternal and actual "owner" (especially for the land of Israel), thus the people today should avoid polluting it and keep it clean for the future generations. According to this opinion, Judaism is clearly in line with the principles of environmental protection and [sustainable development](#)

In Jewish law (*halakhah*), ecological concerns are reflected in Biblical protection for fruit trees, rules in the Mishnah against harming the public domain, Talmudic debate over noise and smoke damages, and contemporary responsa on agricultural pollution. In Conservative Judaism, a new initiative has adopted *ecokashrut* ideas begun in the 1970s. In addition, Jewish activists have recruited principles of *halakhah* for environmental purposes, such as the injunction against unnecessary destruction, known as *bal tashkhit*.

In contemporary Jewish liturgy, ecological concerns have been promoted by adapting a kabbalistic ritual for the holiday of trees, Tu B'shvat. Biblical and rabbinic texts have been enlisted for prayers about the environment, especially in Orthodox Judaism and Jewish Renewal movements.

In the U.S., a coalition of Jewish environmentalists (COEJL) undertakes both educational and policy advocacy on such issues as [biodiversity](#) and [global warming](#).^[21] Jewish environmentalists are drawn from all branches of religious life, ranging from Rabbi [Arthur Waskow](#) to a growing Orthodox non-profit.

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In Israel, secular Jews have formed numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations to protect nature and reduce pollution. While Israeli organizations make limited use of Jewish religious teachings, a few do approach Israel's environmental problems from a Jewish standpoint, including an environmental center named after

[Abraham Joshua Heschel](#)

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See also

- [Environmental ethics](#)
- [Evangelical environmentalism](#)
- [Earth Day Sunday](#)
- [Ecotheology](#)
- [Stewardship \(theology\)](#)
- [Faith in Place](#)
- [Spiritual ecology](#)
- [Religion and peacebuilding](#)

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3. [^] [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [Eco-Dharma Center](#). (N.d.) Buddhism and Ecology. Catalan Pyrenees: Nick Day. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.ecodharma.com/influences-articles/buddhism-ecology>
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9. [^] [On Climate, Ethics, Cow Burps and the Dalai Lama](#) October 21, 2011 NYT
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12. [^](http://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/59.20?lang=eng) <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/59.20?lang=eng>
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Further reading

Religions of the World and Ecology Book Series:

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- *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
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External links

- [Forum on Religion and Ecology](#)
- [Emerging Earth Community](#)
- [Journey of the Universe](#)
- [Creation Care Reading Room](#) - online resources for Christian environmental ethics ([Tynedale Seminary](#))
- [Religion and Nature](#)
- [Stories from America's Religious-Environmental Movement](#) ([Renewal \(film\)](#))
- [Islam, Christianity and the Environment](#) , The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre

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