

a green**futures** Special Edition

Published by

 **forum** for
the **future**

MOVING MOUNTAINS

HOW CAN FAITH SHAPE OUR FUTURE?

“Spirituality is the exact opposite of dropping out”

Sustainable development isn't just about triple bottom lines, or enlightened self-interest; primarily, it's a heart and soul story.

I wonder how many people are comfortable with that assertion. I've been struck over the years by the number of people in my 'green' world who have remained sceptical about, or even hostile to, the so-called spiritual dimension of the green movement.

As with so many aspects of sustainable development, this is both personal and political. Personal because people have strong views about faith and religion. They say: "This is what I believe". And beliefs are not just theoretical: they matter enormously to people in practical terms. And it's political, in that the world's major religions play a hugely influential role in the lives of billions of people – and as such, are critical intermediaries in helping to inform and inspire people about living more sustainably.

As Gandhi said, "I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political, religious. All act and react upon one another. I do not believe that the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life."

It is these 'ordinary activities' that we need so urgently to address, and so this special edition looks



at the role of spirituality in doing so. The challenge of dealing with materialism and the excessive lifestyles of the rich can only become more pressing in the future. A lot of the terminology associated with sustainable living – wellbeing, quality of life, simplicity, downsizing – implies a lesser emphasis on money and possessions, and a greater focus on our 'inner' lives, on family and friends, the arts, and on activities with a smaller environmental impact. There is, of course, a lot of secular advice and teaching on living more simply. But for many, the spiritual dimension provides that extra impulse.

There remains the widespread suspicion that the spiritual means to 'drop out': to disappear narcissistically inwards, devoting one's life to meditation and even navel-gazing. There is a time for contemplation, but it seems clear that an exclusive emphasis on the unworldly, on withdrawal from this grubby industrial culture of ours, merely reinforces the parody of spirituality as a morally superior way of dropping out.

For many people today, a more spiritual orientation demands the exact opposite of dropping out. When it comes to the defence of the Earth and its people, it means militantly putting into practice what we profess to believe.

Jonathon Porritt is Founder Director of Forum for the Future.

Two sides of the same coin

If we're going to achieve sustainability, we have to be inspired by the values and visions which we find in the sphere of ethics, morality, spirituality and religion – in other words, in faith. The moment faith and sustainability are separated they lose power. But when they are united they become a force for good.

The scope of politics and economics to drive change is limited by external pressures and circumstances, as well as by vested interests. They are both utilitarian concepts: they teach us to value natural resources only in terms of their usefulness to people, and in particular, to the privileged and the powerful.

From a faith perspective, nature is a divine gift to be celebrated for the joy and benefit of all living beings. Such joy and benefit has to be built on the foundations of humility, mutuality, reciprocity,

interdependence and interconnectedness. The enduring principle of faith is that we are all part of the web of life, and therefore we must treat each other and nature with care and compassion.

Of course life supports life, and we need to take from nature for our survival and wellbeing. But we should receive these gifts with humility and gratitude, not greed and arrogance.

Faiths too have a great responsibility to practise and promote sustainability. They need to transcend their narrow dogmas and institutionalised interests to do so. The ecological integrity of people and the planet overrides all differences and divisions. Sustainability is the spiritual imperative of our time.

Satish Kumar is Editor, Resurgence.

Above: Thousands of Peruvian peasants climb Mount Qollqe Punku each year as part of the Q'oyllur Riti festival, considered the biggest indigenous pilgrimage in America

Making common cause

In the last 25 years, the faiths have become the fastest growing environmental movements in the world, shaping the lives of billions – from the Daoists of China to the Evangelicals of the US. Yet for many environmentalists, this has all happened without them noticing.

Now, following the failure of Copenhagen and the rediscovery by green activists of civil society, secular groups are waking up to the potential of working with the faiths – even viewing them as crucial partners. So what can the faiths bring to the environmentalists' table?

First of all, the fact that they are not conservation bodies. Rather, the faiths include the oldest and most sustainable human organisations in the world. They have perfected how to change constantly without appearing to do so. They can offer consistency and inspiration, but with a renewed emphasis on caring for the Creation.

A second asset is that they talk in a language people understand: not about 'eco-system deliverables', but about nature.

As for funding, they are already committed to running (or helping to run) more than 50% of all schools worldwide or manage up to 8% of the habitable surface of the planet. Doing this in a 'sustainable' way should bring cost savings through efficiency gains, and even additional income (for instance, through the sale of renewable energy, or community-grown food).

The faiths also know how to work with partners in a mutually respectful and trusting way. They hold communities together, inspiring the transformation of individuals, families and wider groups. As sustainability professionals agonise about how to mobilise citizens for effective action, there is much they can learn from these ready-made bodies of individuals who are committed to shared values and activities, and to the recruitment of new members.

They also have something lacking in most governments, mass media and political parties: a long-

term view. It could hardly get any longer than human history seen in the light of eternity! It's been said, famously, that the Vatican thinks in terms of centuries. And the same goes for most religious traditions.

And while some play an advocacy role, most bring continuity and integrity to political, economic and environmental debates. Religious observance is associated often with civic responsibility, voluntary contributions, and aspirations to justice. The faiths still attract many of the best and brightest in society, and even in Europe the views of religious authorities can count for a great deal in politics.

Finally, whereas sustainability professionals may have information, data and expert insights that the faiths do not, the faiths have an authority with the peoples of almost every country in the world – and this is something that the environmental movement could certainly use!

Twenty-five years ago, it was difficult to find any religious leaders who knew there was an environmental crisis. Now, it's rare to find ones who don't. Back then, most conservationists were appalled at the idea of working with religions. Now, I watch with delight as the faiths and environmental organisations are, increasingly, working side by side to save what is, for many of us, the wonder of God's creation.

Martin Palmer is Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. Additional material by Ian Christie.

Below: Shared ground: a stucco ceiling in Córdoba's Mezquita, or Mosque-Cathedral, formerly the site of a pagan temple and Visigothic Christian church

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) is a UK-based secular organisation working with all the major religions of the world to help them develop environmental programmes based on their beliefs and teachings. With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ARC has supported many faith groups to develop 'Seven Year Generational Plans' on climate action, environmental protection and sustainable development. These Plans draw on sacred texts and traditions, putting their values to work on the ground. They were presented at a summit in November 2009 which brought faith leaders from around the world together – a striking contrast to the negligible output of the Copenhagen Summit, one month later. www.arcworld.org



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Photos: iStock / iStock

A world of faith

Ian Christie presents a global reality.



People power: during the Hajj, millions of Muslims travel to Mecca to walk around the Ka'aba. This ancient stone structure is considered the centre of the Islamic world, and a unifying point for worship.

Sometime during 2011, the human population of Earth will reach seven billion – and it will almost certainly keep on rising to the middle of the century, at least. Sustainable development will be based on cooperation at all scales among these billions of individuals and the communities to which they belong. But who are these billions? Depending on which statistics you decide are most reliable, at least two-thirds of them are, in varying degrees, adherents of religious traditions. At most, followers of the world's faiths amount to 90% of the global population. Whichever way you look at it, the religious are in the great majority.

Moreover, they will stay that way. For the growth in the world's population is taking place almost entirely in countries with high levels of religious adherence. And in the West, where birth rates have plummeted over recent decades, any population growth is now associated with immigrant groups, who tend to be members of faith communities. In short, whether you like it or not, the world that must be steered towards sustainable development is overwhelmingly a religious one. Sustainable developers everywhere have to face up to this reality.

This special edition explores the relationship between faiths and sustainable development. Sustainability organisations in the West are dominated by secular people and attitudes. Indifferent, or perhaps hostile, to religion, they have little or no contact with faith communities. Given the scale of religious adherence worldwide, sustainable development movements can't afford to ignore or reject opportunities for collaboration and communication associated with faith. As Martin Palmer, Director of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) puts it: "Why would you not want to work with the world's largest source of social capital?"

There is a lot of work to be done in raising

awareness of this capital and dispelling misconceptions. What resources do religions worldwide have for promoting sustainable development? What are the barriers to cooperation – both between the faiths, and between religious and secular groups – and how can we overcome them? And how are the faiths responding to environmentalism and the challenges of sustainable development?

God never went away

For most of the past century and more, sociologists and other observers have confidently expected that the world would become ever more secular. Influential philosophers (including Marx, Freud, Weber and Durkheim) have argued that modernisation erodes religious belief and observance. For them, faith simply isn't compatible with advancements in science and technology, industrialisation and urban lifestyles.

For a long time, this theory of secularisation seemed plausible. Especially in the UK, where church attendance had been falling since the late 1950s, it looked like common sense.

We need to think again. Europe no longer looks like the vanguard of inevitable global secularisation. Instead, it looks like a global anomaly. Outside Europe and liberal urban North America, the faiths are thriving. This is a great age of religious expansion, in fact. Forms of Christianity and Islam are booming, particularly in Africa and Asia. In a recent book, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge show that 'God is Back' [see resource guide, online]. The authors highlight that China, not long ago officially atheist, is on track to become both the world's biggest Christian and Muslim nation over the coming decades. Pentecostal Christianity is perhaps the biggest story of all – and largely unreported in secular Britain and the rest of Europe. This form of the faith is taking the urban poor of Latin America from Catholicism at a rapid rate, and it is thriving in sub-Saharan Africa and industrial South Korea alike.

Even in Europe, where formal Christian allegiance has been waning for centuries, the churches, and now the Islamic communities and other faiths that have taken root, are a significant presence. Over a million people in the UK attend church services each week, and the last census showed over 70% of the population in England and Wales identify themselves as Christian. Sociologist Philip Jenkins argues that migration to the EU in the next few decades will inject more Muslim and Christian influence into Europe, and could also stimulate a revival of home-grown Christian traditions.

Whatever happens, the idea that modern life means the triumph of atheism or agnosticism has taken a battering.

So what does this mean for sustainability? It's worth taking a moment to consider the assets and

resources of the major faiths. Their scale is often not fully appreciated.

Take the media. In the Worldwatch Institute report *Invoking the Spirit*, Gary Gardner estimates that the faith traditions produce more daily newspapers than the total published in Western Europe.

Increasingly, religious organisations and communities are sophisticated users of the internet, mobile communications and television. Influential Christian television networks include Emmanuel TV, one of the most viewed stations in Africa and SAT-7 in the Middle East. In the US, the National Religious Broadcasters represent over 1,600 broadcasters with "billions of dollars in media holdings and staggering political clout", according to the Columbia Journalism Review.

Religious groups also have immense holdings of land and buildings. According to ARC, this includes some 5% of the world's forests, and many of the world's most visited tourist destinations: temples, mosques, synagogues, monasteries and churches.

They are also connected to more than half of all schools, and this goes beyond simply owning the sites. Across the developing world, and even in Europe, where the state is the dominant provider of public services, religious bodies are important suppliers of education, health support, and community hubs.

And their activities aren't restricted to the charitable do-good type: they are also big business. ARC calculates that the combined shares of the world's 11 largest faiths amount to 6-8% of the world's total market for institutional investment.

But above all, the faiths have people power: four in five of us are, to some extent, members of faith communities. If just a fraction of this huge body of believers were to connect their faith to sustainable development and act accordingly, with the support of their institutions, the gains could be world-changing.

Religious leaders could play a significant role in making explicit the connections between current concerns for the environment and age-old teachings about our dependence on the natural world, and the dangers of greed and excess.

If all of this were harnessed for sustainable development, imagine what capacity for change would be unleashed.

Stumbling blocks on both sides

But for many believers, awareness of environmental problems in their everyday lives remains low. The connection between their faith and sustainable lifestyles and policies is not obvious – just as many non-believers fail to make the link between their consumption and environmental problems. In the West, faith communities can feel marginalised by mainstream media and policymakers. In the face of consumerism and capitalism, fundamentalist sects have grown, determined to resist modernity and cling to what is imagined to be the core of their religion.

This has led to conflict not only between religion and secular cultures, but also within faiths. There are fault lines in many faiths between those willing to adapt and interpret their beliefs and traditions in the light of contemporary realities, and those who insist on literal interpretations of the sacred texts. These divisions are exacerbated in many places by economic, ethnic, social and environmental tensions.

There is also resistance to harnessing the power of faiths for sustainable development on the other side of the fence. Sceptics argue that there is little that faiths can offer beyond abstract statements about values that make no difference, whether to believers or non-adherents. Unsustainable development is as marked in the most devout parts of the world as it is in secular ones. It doesn't help that the major religions, especially since 9/11, have been associated with violence, oppression of women, resistance to birth control, and other agendas rejected by liberal societies. Such associations, though unrepresentative, offer little incentive to secular bodies to see the faiths as partners in sustainable development.

But whatever the obstacles, the case for making common cause is a powerful one [see 'Making common cause', p3]. There is a fundamental and urgent need for change, not just in technologies and policies, but in values and behaviour, particularly among the affluent who dominate global consumption.

Green movements and global justice campaigns have been almost the only political forces in the last quarter century in the West to challenge the free-market ideology. But they have often failed to recognise the shared themes between their critique and that of many religious leaders.

Some of the fiercest critiques of modern capitalism and globalisation have come from the present Pope and his predecessor John Paul II – a fact obscured by the sexual policy obsessions of the Catholic churches. Some of the most profound reflections on our responsibility to act on climate change have come from Anglican bishops. There is a large movement among conservative US evangelicals – not well-known as environmentalists to date – to promote 'creation care' and action on climate change. And a profound emphasis on respect for the natural world and the connections between human and non-human life is at the heart of the Eastern faith traditions, such as Buddhism, Daoism and Hinduism.

The sustainability agenda can offer the religions of the world an incentive for cooperation – both between themselves, and with secular parties. The development of many multi-faith initiatives suggests that this is not an empty hope. Major statements from religious leaders on the ecological crises we face demonstrate that there is plenty of common ground between Pope Benedict, the Muslim World League, the Church of England, the World Jewish Congress, the Hindu Virat Samaj, the Dalai Lama, the Baha'i delegation to the UN, and so on, around the world's faiths. The Seven Year Generational Plans of the faiths, as promoted by ARC and UNDP, offer a striking array of initiatives.

Where do we go from here? We know that technology and market-led approaches to the ecological crisis and to global inequalities are necessary – but not sufficient. A sustainable future also depends on changes in values and behaviour. As this becomes ever more apparent, the need for a spiritual and ethical vision to bring policy to life will grow. It is vital to explore the potential here with imagination, energy and open-mindedness. Together, the faiths and secular organisations could indeed 'move mountains'.

Ian Christie is a Fellow of the Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey, and an Associate of Green Alliance.

"The world that must be steered towards sustainable development is a religious one"

Gift of life?

Huw Spanner asks what a renewed sense of the sacred could do for the planet.

“The Soil Association handbook reads like an Islamic testimony on how one should behave”

The idea of the sacred is nowadays quite alien to the secular West. Some of us still lower our voices if we go into a church, without being entirely sure why, and we all pay lip service to ‘the sanctity of human life’; but that seems to be it. Nature itself has been thoroughly desecrated by our culture – which is perhaps why, almost everywhere, the natural world is being desecrated.

Christian theologian Michael Northcott argues that without a spiritual account of nature “as a place where the divine is revealed”, it will be difficult to come back from the brink of its destruction. It’s unlikely that conservation science will be able to change minds enough to have a real impact on damaging behaviour, he holds – because it colludes with what is at the heart of the problem: that is, the worldview that there are no limits, because nothing is sacred.

Are there, then, more limits when the world is considered to be sacred?

“In all of the Eastern traditions,” explains Satish Kumar, Editor of *Resurgence*, “God is in everything and everything is divine. We receive the fruit of the Earth as a gift, with gratitude and humility – which is essentially what worship means. And generosity, too, is essential: because we receive so much, we ourselves have to give. And there is one more thing: restraint. Only in restraint is there real freedom – and at the moment Western society has forgotten restraint completely.”

For some, these principles of gratitude, generosity and restraint are just as absent from religious communities in the West as they are from secular ones. Often it isn’t a lack of religion, but the Abrahamic religions themselves that are held to blame for the

anthropocentrism that devalues the non-human world.

In these religions, explains the influential German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, “humanity stands between the divine and the earthly: as the image of God, humanity is appointed ruler of the earth”.

But this is not entirely fair, says Lufti Radwan, who runs an organic farm with his wife Ruby, near Oxford.

“In Islam there is a concept of the unity of all creation. So, while we have a particular role in nature, there is no separation between us and nature. Islam does not teach that the world was made for us – in fact, the emphasis goes the other way: we are *khalifa*, custodians or guardians. We have responsibility.”

Radwan says these Qur’anic principles underpin everything he does as a farmer. Beyond its organic status, he wants the land he farms to be a “haven for wildlife” – a vibrant ecosystem sustaining a wide variety of plants and animals.

“The Soil Association handbook reads like an Islamic testimony on how one should behave”, he explains, “only without any references to the Creator. The principles are essentially the same, based on an understanding of how to create balance and harmony.”

And what of Christianity? Andrew Linzey, Professor of Theology at Oxford University and Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, argues that the ‘dominion’ God gives mankind in the book of Genesis has been misinterpreted. As he sees it, the role of mankind on earth has to be understood in the light of the example set by the Lord Jesus, who said, “I am among you as one who serves.” So in other words, just as Jesus serves mankind, humans are called to be the ‘servant species’ in this world.

Many charitable organisations are founded on Christian principles of servitude – such as the animal welfare charity now known as the RSPCA, first set up by Anglican clergymen in 1824. In a similar vein, the conservation charity A Rocha characterises its work as ‘a response to God’s love for his whole creation, revealed in the Bible and personally in Jesus Christ’.

But it would be a stretch to argue that these principles underpin much of what goes on in economies where Christianity is (historically or currently) the dominant faith.

“The fact is”, argues Professor Northcott, “John Stuart Mill is a much more influential philosopher in our culture than Jesus, and even Christians now think in utilitarian terms about what will maximise human happiness. The new ‘sacred’ in our culture is monetary value, and the supposed connection between that and human wellbeing.”

Mary Colwell, environmental adviser to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, looks to religion to challenge the culture of market economies. “The most important thing religions can do is bring about a change of heart”, she says, “even if it’s getting the next generation to think that the planet is sacred.”

From a Christian faith perspective, she explains: “If you view the tree in front of you as something wonderful, a great holy manifestation of the sacred god – if you don’t just think it’s a potential cardboard box – then you’re likely to treat it differently. Just as if you see someone as a whole person, beyond their role, you’re likely to treat them differently.”

Applying this logic to the need for action in response to climate change, Colwell argues that if you change your behaviour because it’s the right thing to do – and not just in response to a crisis – then this change is more likely to last.

“All faiths have a sense of the long term – of revelation over a journey”, she says. “It’s very different to a campaigning mindset which says, for instance, ‘We have 18 months to eradicate world poverty’.”

David Shreeve, Director of the Conservation Foundation, and also environmental adviser to the Archbishops’ Council, hopes this long-term vision will become more apparent in the actions of the Church.

Calling the elements to prayer

The dainty onion domes that often adorn minarets – the tall spires from which Muslims are called to prayer – have always had an environmentally friendly function. As the dome is heated by the sun, it draws air from inside the mosque and releases it, acting as a natural cooling system.

Now, architects and Muslim communities are taking this principle a step further, adding wind turbines and solar panels to create a new generation of eco-mosques.

Among the first to take action were residents in the Turkish village of Buyukeceli. In 2010 they decided to champion renewable energy because they were unhappy about proposals for a nearby nuclear power plant. After being denied permission to put solar panels on the roof of a school, they chose to retrofit their local mosque. Greenpeace provided a string of photovoltaic panels to meet all of the mosque’s electricity needs, and within ten days they were in place. A green roof has also been installed.

Over in Germany, meanwhile, eco-architect Selcuk Ünyilmaz is designing a new mosque for the northern city of Norderstedt, which will be one of the first to use the minarets to harness the power of the wind.

The mosque will have two 22-metre towers, with a pair of 1.5-metre glass rotor blades in each to generate a third of the building’s electricity. Replacing a more ramshackle house of worship for 200 Muslims, the new mosque will be part of a €2.5m complex, to include entertainment and retail facilities. Funding is yet to be confirmed. – *Sylvia Rowley*



“Certainly”, he says, “the message from the Church of England’s leaders is [increasingly] that concern for the environment should be fundamental for Christians. Seven or eight years ago, we had one bishop who spoke on environmental issues in the House of Lords. Now, 26 of them want to.”

Huw Spanner is a former editor of the Christian magazine Third Way. Additional material by Anna Simpson.

Sacred groves

In the indigenous Japanese religion of Shintoism, trees are sacred. Most of Japan’s largest and oldest trees (some dating back several thousand years) lie within *chinju no mori*, the sacred and protected groves around the Shinto shrines where the benevolent *kami* (spirits) dwell, watching over the local community. Caring for the trees, in return, has become a key part of traditional culture and wisdom, and so these ancient groves have been maintained over millennia, providing a precious sanctuary for plants and animals.

But the influence of Shintoism on Japanese forests spreads beyond these groves. The shrines themselves are built largely of wood and number over 80,000 across the country. Some are rebuilt every 20 years according to custom, and how this timber is sourced has wider implications for the future of Japan’s forests.

Japan’s Association of Shinto Shrines has

made a pledge, in collaboration with ARC and WWF, to manage all of its sacred forests sustainably, and to buy timber for its shrines only from sustainably managed forests. They hope that this will counter the effect of cheap imported wood, which is undermining the importance of sustaining domestic sources, and in some cases leading to soil erosion where whole areas of forest have been cleared.

The Ise Grand Shrines, the most important Shinto site in Japan are a good example of this pledge in action. Here, continuous cover mixed woodland, as opposed to clear-felled plantations, allows for natural regeneration.

The Shrines are surrounded by a vast forest stretching over nearby mountains. A large organic farm, including rice fields and a vegetable garden, provides offerings for the *kami* and food for the staff. – *Sylvia Rowley*



Faith in action

Snapshots of sustainable practice from around the world

China: Daoist teaching

There are more than 1,500 Daoist temples in China today, and approximately 30,000 Daoist monks and nuns. Tens of millions of people in China follow Daoist practices, and millions more engage in pilgrimages and visits to Daoist sites every year. The China Daoist Association, based in the White Cloud Temple, Beijing, has approved an Eight Year Plan to harness the potential for education and influence that this vast network represents.

Targets include:

- ecological education projects to run in half of all Daoist temples in inland China by 2015
- all Daoist temples in inland China to have systematic ecological regulations by 2017
- summer camps to teach Daoist ecological wisdom to young people and students from China and abroad
- an Alliance of Daoist Healthcare to promote the correlations between ecologically friendly and healthy lifestyles.

Ghana: nurturing trees

With funding from the US campaign Interfaith Power and Light, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana has launched a programme to plant two million trees. It is working with the Ghana

Wildlife Division and the Environmental Protection Agency to support farmers and communities to obtain seedlings and tend the plants as they grow. It is also encouraging villagers to harvest trees planted in sustainable woodlots for fuel, to alleviate the pressure on forests. The Church also offers training in the manufacture of energy efficient stoves, so that less wood will be required in the long run. As part of a pledge to nurture and protect the trees after the planting is done, the Church is also training 200 firefighter volunteers who will learn how to stop forest fires in replanted areas.

India: cleaning sacred waters

Ten years ago, the Sikh holy man Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal waded into the Kali Bein (below) – a sacred, but terribly polluted, river in the Punjab. Drawing on the Sikh tradition of *kar sewa* (voluntary service), he began to pull out the silt and sewage. Over the six years that followed, thousands of volunteers joined him, carrying out physical labour, raising funds for equipment, and launching a campaign to reduce the flow of sewage into the river by reviving traditional methods of waste disposal and treatment. A government order to divert water from a nearby canal was eventually obtained. As the riverbed was cleared, natural springs revived and the river began to fill up. Since then, trees have been planted along its banks and fishing has been banned to preserve biodiversity. “We have proved that it is possible to restore our rivers to a pristine condition if we all come together”, Seechewal told *Time* magazine, which profiled him as one of 30 environmental heroes from across the globe.



England: a church committed to change

In 2009 the Church of England published *Church and Earth*, a statement of its environmental commitments over a seven-year plan and its achievements to date. Humanity is “approaching the limits of unsustainable economic growth and exploitation of the natural world”, it says, and calls for a “huge collective effort” to mitigate climate change. The Church’s own commitments include:

- a carbon cut of 42% by 2020 – one of the most stretching targets set by any state or organisation
- all Church schools to be classed as ‘sustainable’ by 2016, in line with emerging government policy
- the establishment of a Climate Justice Fund to support environmental projects benefiting churches and their communities in East Africa
- the development of a sustainable procurement system for the Church
- a code for sustainable churches, drawing on the standards of the National Trust, the Building Research Establishment, and the Green Building Council.

St Paul's: a lighter footprint?



Photos: sambarfotos / iStock; photomorph / iStock; APC; code64 / iStock; Engleok / iStock

“Creation works as a whole”

At the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science (IFEES), we focus on four Qur’anic principles. The first is unity: the principle that the universe is one entity and the human community is part of that. The second is *fitra*: that our origin is in creation, and that we are not to tamper with it. If we do, there are repercussions, as we now face. The third is that creation is in balance, and so we must not introduce imbalance, or the system won’t work. And the fourth is responsibility. As stewards of creation, the earth has been left to us in trust.

Fazlun Khalid is Founder and Director of IFEES.

Allah brings the rain

In 2009, the British Council worked with the BBC World Service Trust to research attitudes towards climate change and understanding of the issues among people across Africa. This work, the first of its kind, talked to thousands of people across ten countries, taking in rural and urban, rich and poor, educated and marginalised.

One of the key findings was that many Africans framed their view of the environment and their relationship with it through their faith. “The secret is with Allah. Allah brings the rain. The one who causes the drought, who sends us the drought is Allah”, said one Afari (rural Ethiopian) woman – a typical response from people of all faiths.

Colleagues across the continent began working on a programme that would draw on what we had learnt, by educating African faith leaders about climate change and inspiring them to engage with the issues. Two forums, the first in Nigeria in February 2010, and a second in Ethiopia six months later, brought together faith leaders, environmental activists and policy makers to learn from each other.

At the first event, the delegates crafted a declaration on climate change, in which they charged themselves with taking on the issue. They backed this up with a series of pledges, from preaching to their followers about the importance of the issue, to taking practical steps to green their places of worship. One delegate, Sheikh Kabara, leader of the Qadriyya movement for Nigeria and West Africa, subsequently addressed a group of three million regional followers and made climate change one of his central themes.

In Ethiopia, the leaders reconvened to showcase their work, share what they’d learnt and make longer-term plans – which include expanding their network, working with non-faith agencies interested in climate care, and collaborating across borders.

While the British Council’s formal project has ended, the network is still functioning and working with partners such as ARC and the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences in the UK. The faith leaders recognised the importance of the work and the value of their role. As John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, notes: “All of us here are probably doing a lot in our respective faith communities on climate change. But there is a considerable added value to whatever we say and do *together*.”

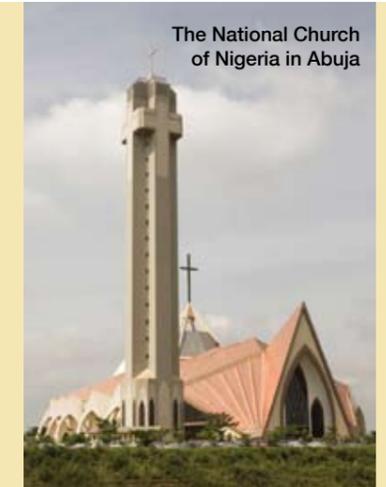
Christine Wilson is an Adviser in Education and Society at the British Council.

“We must inspire and energise”

In the eyes of Christians, we’re living in a creation that we’re charged to take care of – from the wildlife in our church yards, to our waste and where we put it. Today, the most critical environmental threat is climate change, which is primarily the consequence of our use of fossil fuels. The main way in which the Church of England uses energy is in running our buildings. In our personal lives there are several other factors, such as food and flying. We mustn’t be seen to be bossy on this front: we must inspire, energise and inform. Some think people will be turned off by too much information, but they’re not. I see waves of relief crossing people’s faces when you take the trouble to explain the greenhouse effect.

But first we need to put our own house in order, by reducing the energy use of our churches. Then there’s our wider role in addressing the public at large. We mustn’t be afraid to speak up.

Brian Cuthbertson is Head of Environmental Challenge, London Diocesan Fund.



The National Church of Nigeria in Abuja

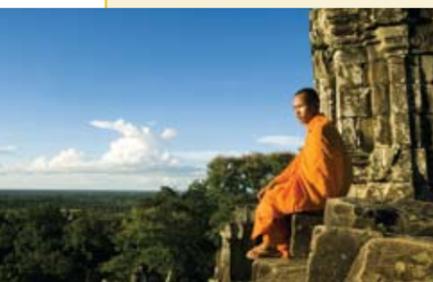
“What you do to the environment, you do to yourself”

A very central principle in Buddhist teaching is the oneness of self and environment. The environment may appear to be separate from ‘me’, but Buddhism teaches that my environment is a reflection of my life, not separate from my life. They are ‘two, but not two’.

As you practise Buddhism, this ‘oneness’ becomes clearer. Practising Buddhism is about attaining enlightenment, and one important aspect of this is raising and broadening your consciousness. As you do so, you become more aware of your effect on the environment. You realise that what you’re doing to the environment, you’re doing to yourself.

And everything we do has an effect: that’s another important Buddhist teaching. If we do negative things, that negativity is lodged in our lives. Equally, if we do life-affirming things, this comes back to our life as well.

Robert Samuels is General Director UK of Soka Gakkai International, a lay Buddhist association with 12 million members worldwide.



Go forth and prosper



Businesses are turning to faith to ensure their future, says **Symon Hill**.

The *Financial Times* is not known for its religious coverage, but on 16 April it led with news of a decision by the Church of England to vote against “excessive” bonuses in the companies in which it invests. The Church Commissioners considered bonuses of three times the basic salary to be “sufficient” – which would allow the CEO of HSBC £1 million a year. This ruling wasn’t bold enough, however, for Chris Wood of Christians Against the Cuts. He accused the Commissioners of “failing to challenge the culture of greed and speculation inherent in the free market”.

It’s to be expected that religious groups have views about business ethics and practice. What might come as a surprise is that these views have become a mainstream concern. Following the global financial crisis, both corporations and commentators have brought religion into discussions of corporate responsibility.

The World Economic Forum recently published a report called ‘Faith and the Global Agenda: Values for the Post-Crisis Economy’. In it, John DeGioia, President Founder of Georgetown University and Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum ask which values will be “vital for our collective future” and what “positive role [...] faith can play in articulating those values”. The most fundamental question of the moment, they argue, is “whether we can adopt a more communitarian spirit” – moving away from “excesses which undermine social peace”.

But it’s not just about doing less harm. Businesses are actively looking to spirituality and religion to help their employees be even more effective in the workplace.

“Spirituality in business is springing up all over”, writes Patricia Aburdene, a leading commentator on corporate transformation in her book *Megatrends 2010: the rise of conscious capitalism*. She cites Intel as an example. The silicon developer now encourages employees to take part in various internal peer support networks, including a Baha’i Group, a Bible-based Christian network and Muslim and Jewish community groups. And it’s not alone. Many big consumer brands, from Wal-Mart to Pizza Hut, now run prayer groups and have chaplains to offer moral support to employees.

“The old paradigm of leaving your beliefs behind when you go to work is no longer satisfying”, says Stewart Friedman, Practice Professor of Management at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. “More than ever, people want work that fits in with a larger sense of purpose in life. For many people, that includes a concept of God, or something like it.”

Of course, the association of sound business practice with religious values isn’t new. Deborah Cadbury commends the ‘Quaker capitalism’ of her Victorian ancestors in her book *Chocolate Wars*. The dark chocolate bar Bournville takes its name from a village built for Cadbury’s workers, with good-quality housing, sports fields, a lido and free medical care – but no pubs – based on George Cadbury’s temperance Quaker values.

More recently, when the Fairtrade scheme was

a start-up looking for niche places to sell ethically sourced goods, churches proved the best place to find willing customers. It was thanks to well-run campaigns by Christian Aid and others that the now influential scheme finally hit the supermarket shelves.

So much for the role religion can play in corporate ethics and practice. But what can it bring to the finance system itself?

Muslim commentators have been quick to point out that the Shari’a prohibition on charging interest when lending money helped Islamic banks to survive the crash. For Swati Taneja, Director of the International Islamic Finance Forum, current interest in more cautious investment practices offers “a golden opportunity for Islamic finance to provide an alternative model which, by its very nature, binds both the real and financial economies – just what the world needs right now”.

Indeed, Islamic finance is now big business. Some of the world’s largest banks and investment houses are now Shari’a-compliant, including Barclays, Citibank and Merrill Lynch. The economist Moin Siddiqi argues that behind its success is the fact that it accords “no intrinsic value” to money, which it regards merely as a means to produce socio-economic value. A survey of 29 of the largest Islamic commercial banks, investment banks and asset managers – published in 2010 by the Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions – found that over half (55%) had quotas for investment in activities relating to social, development and environmental activities, and over three-quarters had a policy for charitable activities.

The financial system is itself sustained by a kind of faith. Banks depend on our trust that numbers on computers carry a higher meaning, which can ultimately buy assets in the real world. Politicians avoid ‘upsetting the markets’, as if these were a supernatural force to be appeased at all costs.

The early narratives of many religions address this ‘force’, and offer teachings to help maintain positive social values in the face of wealth. The Qur’an describes the “people of truth” as those who “spend of [their] substance ... for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves”. Jesus was arrested following a very public protest in the Temple in Jerusalem, where he tipped over the tables of the traders and moneychangers. The Buddha abandoned a life of luxury to teach freedom from desire.

And in the Jewish tradition, we find perhaps the most radical socio-economic idea of all. The book of Leviticus declared that every 50th year should be a ‘Jubilee’, in which debts would be cancelled and slaves set free. Far from calling for financial prudence, this was an invitation to generosity on an extravagantly *imprudent* scale. It makes today’s cautious words about banking reform sound rather feeble.

Symon Hill is Associate Director of the think tank Ekklesia and author of The No-Nonsense Guide to Religion (New Internationalist, 2010). Additional material by Anna Simpson.

“More than ever, people want work that fits in with a larger sense of purpose in life”

Left: Golden opportunity? The Islamic Development Bank offers an alternative to interest-based loans, in accordance with Shari’a law.

Breaking bread

John Nyota brings religion to the table.

In 1950, Hilda Porter, a missionary who had been based in China, returned to England to find that overseas students coming to universities were having trouble finding accommodation and suffering from exclusion and racism. She persuaded the Methodist Church to support her in setting up a hostel in Bayswater, to provide a safe and welcoming haven for young people from all over the world.

Today, it's a hotel and conference centre managed to high environmental standards. It monitors its footprint, not just in terms of carbon, but also water and food. Wherever possible, ingredients are locally sourced, organic and fairly traded, and suppliers are asked to comply with ecological and animal welfare standards. Food waste is kept to a minimum through careful planning, and any leftovers are recycled or disposed in a way that is not harmful to the environment.

From a Christian perspective, these practices draw on a long tradition of hospitality which harks

back to the book of Genesis. There's the passage where Abraham is sitting near the great trees of Mamre sheltering from the heat, when he notices three men standing by. He hurries to meet them, saying, "Let me get you some water and something to eat, so that you can be refreshed..." And off he goes to choose a calf for them, asking his wife Sarah to bake some bread. Another well-known story of hospitality in the Christian tradition is when Jesus feeds 5,000 with just five loaves and two fish – a great lesson in resource management, fair distribution and minimal waste!

Making sure there's enough to go round is one thing. But there's also something about breaking bread and sharing a meal together that creates intimacy – even without the candles, sweet aromas and wine. Most major world religions bring families and communities together to share a ritual feast, whether it's the Christian Communion or the Jewish Seder or the Muslim Iftar during Ramadan. It offers a moment to reflect on the natural resources on which we all depend, and on the processes that brought the food to our table. The rain – seen by many cultures and religions as a gift of God – falls on soil that we have a responsibility to nurture. The livestock must also be treated with dignity, as must those who harvest the food and bring it to the table.

As consumers we have enormous potential to put faith-based values, such as compassion, justice and equity into practice. "Eat of the good things we have provided for your sustenance, but commit no excess therein", commands the Qur'an (20:81). Prophet Mohammed was known to eat fruits and vegetables grown in the region in which he lived and in season – and today, more and more consumers are choosing to buy fresh, locally sourced food or even grow their own. It's a trend that's helping people to be more aware of the natural resources around them, such as water, soil and light.

Muslims and Jews apply religious values to their daily eating habits through prescribed dietary laws. There are similarities between a halal (which means 'permitted') diet and a kosher one: both avoid pork and have a ritual slaughter method for permitted meat which must be adhered to. Halal extends beyond food into other consumer goods, including pharmaceuticals and cosmetics which contain ingredients derived from animals. Faith leaders are well placed to encourage ethical consumption and behaviour. If you already buy halal products, looking for a Fairtrade or organic label too is perhaps a smaller step than if you had never really thought to apply ethics at the check-out.

Reverend John Nyota is Director of Charity at the Methodist International Centre. This piece draws on a talk he delivered to the British Council Ethiopia Forum for Sub-Saharan Africa religious leaders.

Breaking their fast: thousands gather to share an evening meal at the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina



Waste not, want not

The Sebata Nunnery, 25km from the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, will produce fuel from organic waste (such as cow dung) thanks to a new bio-digester funded by ARC in partnership with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The methane harvested will provide fuel to cook meals for more than one thousand local children at the nunnery's school, and for over two hundred orphaned children. Slurry, a by-product of the process, will be used as a high quality fertilizer for the nunnery's crops.

It's hoped that using biogas instead of firewood as a fuel will reduce the level of respiratory disease and eye irritations caused by fumes from cooking fires. It will also free many of the girls from punishing hours of collecting fuel wood each day, and reduce the number of trees cut down to provide fuel.

Social skills

Just how much does society owe religion? A lot, says **Robert May**.



There's one major problem in evolutionary biology left unresolved, and that is how on earth we organised ourselves in cooperative societies.

There are big benefits to us all in society. The only problem is that the group as a whole is vulnerable to those who make the most of these benefits without paying the cost. Prairie dogs and hunter-gatherers alike could deal with this because the 'pack' was mostly made up of relatives.

But what happened once we started aggregating in bigger groups – in towns and cities? It's an unsolved problem how we came to organise in ways which have been so good for us.

There are interesting experimental games in evolutionary biology where, if everyone plays fair, everyone wins; if a few cheat, they may prosper, but more commonly everyone loses... Crucially, however, if you identify cheats and punish them, this leads to cooperation. All that's needed is the altruism of people to organise and pay for that individual to be punished, for the benefit of the group as a whole.

How much better, then, to have a punisher who acts but isn't in the game! Someone whose role it is to promote good behaviour. Others have suggested that ultimately the origins of gods derived in a constructive way to permit cohesion of large aggregates of humans behaving well to each other.

As for society today, I see compassionate, non-fundamentalist religion as a good thing – when it's working well. It is hugely important in getting us to come together to sustain the planet. We can't go on having indefinite exploitation of the planet. Religion got us started on this cooperative road. So too, I think, if religion isn't part of the solution, there is no solution.

Of course, it's even more effective if religions

work together. Cooperation ought to be one of their core values.

Robert May is Professor of Zoology and Emeritus Fellow at Merton College, Oxford University, and a former President of the Royal Society.

All ears: an interfaith group at the North London Central Mosque

Understanding each other

At the core of the British Council's work in cultural relations is the belief that creating opportunities for people to understand each other better, work together more and learn from one another is crucial to building secure, more prosperous and sustainable futures for us all.

The British Council is not a faith-based organisation, but belief, faith and worldview underpin many of the cultures we work with. If we were to avoid or ignore the role belief plays in an increasingly globalised world, we run the risk of marginalising many of the people we should be engaging.

At the forums we convened in Nigeria and Ethiopia, we realised that engaging with people around their worldview had potential impact far beyond our climate change programme. In fact, we have been working directly or indirectly on projects relating to belief, community and culture for many years. We are now in the process of developing a new strand of work, Belief in Dialogue, which aims to acknowledge the complex identities of individuals within diverse communities worldwide and build capacity for global citizenship.

At the first African Interfaith Forum on Climate Change in 2010, the leaders crafted and endorsed a declaration that stated: "Faith leaders have a crucial role to play in pressing for changes in behaviour at every level of society." The British Council's cultural relations work has helped to make this a reality in their communities, and is now building on that experience, by creating opportunities worldwide for dialogue and engagement across cultures and communities.

Christine Wilson is an Adviser in Education and Society at the British Council.

Pilgrims' progress

Can the devout stay on the right path for the planet?

Dixe Wills tracks their footprints.

"I'm going on a pilgrimage."

How many other statements say so much about a person in so few words? Anyone who seeks to be a pilgrim must nurture a taste for adventure, be unafraid of hardship, harbour a singular devotion to their religion, and not be too fussed about global warming...

Or so it might seem, when one looks at the vast carbon footprint left by the sandals of the world's pilgrims. With every major religion on the planet encouraging some form of pilgrimage amongst its adherents, the number of souls criss-crossing the globe is staggering.

Precise numbers are impossible to come by but, for example, the Saudi Arabian authorities claim that around 3.5 million Muslims participated in last year's Hajj. Five million Christians flock to Lourdes every year, and Mexico City's Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe attracts 20 million. Buddhists (no accurate record exists of the numbers) head for four main pilgrimage sites in northern India and southern Nepal, among others. Jews of the Diaspora visit Israel. Sikhs, meanwhile, seek spiritual nourishment in Pakistan. But it's Hindus that are the most enthusiastic pilgrims, with Melas on particularly holy years attracting up to 60 million devotees to various cities in India.

Raising a highly speculative finger in the air, if we were to say that a typical year sees 90 million pilgrims on the move, and that a third of these fly an average of 4,000 miles on a round trip, the carbon dioxide from flights alone would amount to over 15 million tonnes. That's something like the annual emissions of four coal-fired power plants. Add to that all the other forms of transport, the infrastructure needed to receive pilgrims, the possible water stress caused by the huge numbers involved, and the manufacture and transport of the obligatory souvenirs – and the environmental impact that pilgrims impose on the planet becomes apparent.

Thankfully, there is hope for those who would rather their faith did not conflict with their ecological principles. The biggest breakthrough in terms of emissions reductions has come with the opening in 2010 of the first section of the so-called 'Mecca Metro', an 18km Chinese-built light railway. Once complete (in 2012) it is expected to replace

approximately 30,000 car journeys a day during the Hajj. A high-speed rail network linking Mecca with the holy city of Medina and the port of Jeddah is also on the drawing board.

Another significant move came at an International Islamic Green Movement meeting in Jakarta, with a clarion call to governments to green up their respective Islamic holy sites. The Saudi authorities have already responded with plans to switch mosques, hotels and banqueting suites over to solar power.

So what might a truly sustainable pilgrimage look like? For an idea, one could do worse than examine the Way of St James routes to Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain. Christians traditionally make the journey to the city on foot and are encouraged to live simply, using small wayside inns or specially provided hostels. Rather than have one prescribed route, the physical impact of the pilgrimage on local fauna, flora and water tables is dissipated by a network of paths spread across Western Europe for the faithful to follow.

Hoping to make such examples more mainstream, ARC has launched the Green Pilgrim Cities network [see 'Sacred sites on the move']. Devised by representatives of nine of the world's major religions, the network's vision is to inspire both the journey-makers and their destinations to act more sustainably.

"The plan for the city of Jerusalem is initially to green the infrastructure through initiatives such as the new light rail system currently under construction", notes ARC's Alison Hilliard. "The Etchmiadzin greening plan includes offering pilgrims affordable and healthy traditional food, installing solar panels at the Gevorgyan Theological University, and setting up twenty sustainable bed and breakfast facilities for pilgrims."

Kusum Vyas, ARC representative and President of the Texas-based Living Planet Foundation, was encouraged by a visit to the state of Gujarat in India, where the cities of Dwarka, Somnath and Ambaji have been drawing up their eco-pilgrimage plans:

"I'm particularly impressed with Ambaji", Vyas says, "where they have adapted the Hindu practice of *prasadam*. Instead of the pilgrims receiving food at

the temple, they are given tulsi seeds and saplings of fruit-bearing trees to take home to sow or plant."

And in Amritsar, alongside a mass tree-planting programme to celebrate the recently inaugurated Sikh Environment Day (14th March), locally made and designed pedal rickshaws were recently introduced to ferry visitors about.

But ultimately, responsibility for the footprint of a pilgrimage rests with the pilgrim. Conscious of this, Arwa Aburawa – a journalist with a particular interest in how Islam can inspire more people to care for their planet – is studying the carbon footprint left by her relatives when they went on Hajj from Manchester last year. Asked how she would green the experience when she follows in their footsteps one day, her answer is unequivocal: "Slow travel – that would be the really interesting way to do it. It's not only greener but I'm sure it would also add to the spiritual benefits of the Hajj."

And perhaps this is the message that will most resonate with all devout wanderers: that where pilgrimages are concerned, it's better to travel holistically than to arrive.

Dixe Wills is a freelance writer specialising in sustainable travel and tourism.

Below: Sikhs reach the Golden Temple in Amritsar
Bottom: Monks on a 42-day Pad Yatra (journey by foot) through Himalayan mountain passes

Sacred sites on the move

The popular destinations already signed up to ARC's network of Green Pilgrim Cities are:

- Amritsar, home to the Golden Temple (right), which enshrines the Holy Book of the Sikhs
- Assisi, the burial place of St Francis and one of the most important destinations for Roman Catholics
- Etchmiadzin, where the Armenian Church has its headquarters
- Jerusalem, a holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims
- Trondheim, where the Nidaros Cathedral draws Lutherans from across Norway
- The sites of three important Hindu shrines: Dwarka, dwelling place of Lord Krishna; Somnath, where one of 12 important temples to the Lord Shiva is found; and Ambaji, where the goddess Shree Visa Yantra is worshipped by blindfolded followers.

Photos: APC; Kazuyoshi Nomachi / Corbis



Moving Mountains is a *Green Futures* Special Edition, produced in association with the British Council and the Tedworth Trust, and with editorial support from the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

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Production: Katie Shaw

Design: The Urban Ant Ltd

Printed on Cocoon Silk paper, 100% recycled and FSC certified, by Pureprint, using their environmental technology and vegetable-based inks.

Published July 2011

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Reg charity no. 1040519

Company no. 2959712

VAT reg. no. 677 7475 70

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Green Futures is the leading international magazine on environmental solutions and sustainable futures. Founded by Jonathon Porritt, it is published by Forum for the Future, which works with leaders from business and the public sector to create a green, fair and prosperous world.

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