

Alliance of Religions and Conservation
Religions and the environment: The Assisi Declarations and after.
Teachers' notes for Lesson 1

Teachers notes – GCSE Religious Studies

Religion & the environment 1 – the Assisi declaration

Exercise

Objective: to identify the different understandings of the relationship between humanity, nature and the divine within major religions; understand the communalities between the religions on this issue; understand the significance of the Assisi declarations.

Opening Discussion – why might it be a problem for people to simply use the world and its resources in any way they feel like?

Issues to raise include:

- Messing up where you live
- Messing things up for other people
- Messing things up for the future
- Messing things up spiritually

Small groups exercise

Assign Christian, Hindu, Islamic,
Issue summary of Assisi declarations and comparative notes.

How does each religion characterise the relationship between humanity, nature and the divine?

Questions:

1. Do the teachings of this religion give humanity a different status to the rest of nature?
2. If humanity has a different status what powers and responsibilities to God/the divine does this status confer?
3. If humanity has a different status what relationship with nature does this confer?
4. If humanity is of an equal status with nature what does this mean about the relationship with other living beings?
5. If humanity is of an equal status with nature what might be our importance in the natural world?

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6. What does the religion have to say about the rights and wrongs of using the world and its resources in any way people feel like?
7. What does the religion say will be the consequences for the individual if they do not treat the natural world appropriately?

Groups should create graphic representations of the position of humanity in the order of creation as well as pulling out specific quotes from religious teachings to answer the questions above.

Plenary:

Each group report to each question – what are the commonalities? What are the differences?

Contrast the notions of *stewardship of* and *integration into* the environment.

Why might it have been important, in 1986, for the five Assisi declarations to have been issued together?

- A time of growing general awareness of importance of conservation and environment (endangered species, pollution [inc acid rain], greenhouse gases [Montreal Protocol 1987], impact of world population)
- Important for each religion to understand what their faith has to say about the conservation of nature
- Important for all religions to understand how they are united on the issue of caring for the environment
- Important to establish this issue is a central one for people of all faiths
- Important to understand the need for commitment to act on these understandings
- Important to influence the wider organisation of each religion

What do you think Prince Philip expected to come of the Assisi conference from the conservationist perspective: a challenge to religions? Asking religions for help? An interest in religious philosophy?