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A faith-based environmental approach for people and the planet: Some inter-religious perspectives on our Earth-embeddedness

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For most people on our planet, spiritual values are vital in driving communitarian behaviour. It is becoming increasingly clear that a lasting and effective social commitment must consider cultural, sociological and religious dimensions. In particular, the current environmental crisis has demonstrated how effectively religious communities have mobilised to respond to climate change. With their emphasis on wisdom, social cohesion and interrelationships, religions can be a strategic player in ensuring effective integral human development. The ecological crisis is not just an ethical dilemma but an ontological and theological matter that demands both a new way of thinking and a new way of being. Think differently and act differently! The United Nations (UN) and many governments are increasingly recognising the vital contribution of religious leaders and organisations in political processes, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, hypostasised in the Faith Plans for People and Planet programme, representing the most prominent and boldest environmental initiative to date by the global faith community.

Contribution: Today we realise that a combination of science and spirituality can engage and empower an array of stakeholders from different cultural and religious backgrounds. This article addresses the question of an integrated ecology by selecting appropriate and recent literature from mainstream religions and the subsequent interpretation and application.

Keywords: faith-based ecology; environment; theo-ecology; religions and ecology; sustainable development goals; theology of nature; *Laudato Si'*; Accra Confession; UN and ecology; *Islamic Declaration on Nature*; Orthodox Churches Statement on the Environment; the Earth Charter.

Introduction

In 2015, some world environmentalists came together around an ambitious plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity called *Transforming the World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Launched by the fourth plenary meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Summit in New York on 25–27 September 2015, the programme is articulated in 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) aiming at eradicating poverty in all its forms and creating a safer, healthier and more sustainable world for everyone, everywhere by the year 2030 (UN 2015).

The more recent and unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and the current environmental crisis, especially global climate fluxes, have again emphasised the need to work towards a more sustainable future across national borders, diverse cultural backgrounds and even generations.

To this end, a reflection on the future of people and the planet needs to identify and involve all actors alongside international institutions to fully deploy the power of science in addressing significant global challenges. However, different religious beliefs and values could also play a significant role in tackling global challenges, particularly the environment. Science needs religion to deal with environmental challenges in an integrated way, and a 'Platinum Society'[1] requires religion to be comprehensive (Komiyama & Yamada 2018:263). According to *The Oxford Handbook*

1.'The vision in the twenty-first century must be one of a high-quality society. To be precise, it must be a society where people can maintain quantitative affluence, enhance it if necessary and enjoy a better-quality life and living situation. Or in other words, a society where they can enjoy a better quality of life (QOL). Let's define such a society as a platinum society .... The image of a global community that we should aim for is one in which everyone, and not just those in developed countries on this Earth, is living in a platinum society. As declared in the SDGs, we should "leave no one behind"' (Komiyama 2018:22).

Note: Special Collection: Theology and Nature, sub-edited by Johan Buitendag (University of Pretoria).

of Corporate Social Responsibility, religion has been the first motivation for socially responsible investing (eds. McWilliams et al. 2019:253). Even a secularist naturalist such as Edward Wilson (2006) supported this and suggested that we should set aside differences to save the planet:

> If religion and science could be united on the common ground of biological conservation, the problem would soon be solved. If there is any moral precept shared by people of all beliefs, it is that we owe ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich, and healthful environment. (p. 5)

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, on 12 May 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres specifically addressed the world's religious leaders on the role of faith communities in the pandemic: 'we are all vulnerable, and that shared vulnerability reveals our common humanity' (Guterres 2020:n.p.). He added that the current crisis 'lays bare our responsibility to promote solidarity as the foundation of our response' (Guterres 2020:n.p.).

The UN has long recognised the importance of significant religions in shaping the international community's future concerning the environment and other global challenges. Amongst others, the following appropriate initiatives have developed from this (descriptions cited from their respective statutes as indicated in the relevant footnotes):

1. In 2010 the UN created the Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN-IATF),[2] including more than 20 UN agencies. Its purpose is to provide policy guidance around engagement with faith-based actors, deepen UN system staff's understanding of the intersections of religion and the UN pillars of development, human rights and peace and security and provide strategic policy guidance.
2. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the UN, the Multi-faith Advisory Council (MFAC)[3] organised an online conference titled 'Faith in the UN: Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the UN and looking to the future'. This event provided a platform for representatives of faith-based organisations, faith leaders and critical voices of UN agencies to discuss various pressing issues and their respective roles in dealing with them.
3. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)[4] is the voice for the environment within the UN system. The United Nations Environment Programme acts as a catalyst, advocate, educator and facilitator to promote the global environment's wise use and sustainable development.
4. Faith for Earth Initiative (FEI)[5] has three main goals: to inspire and empower faith organisations and their leaders to advocate for protecting the environment, to green faith-based organisations' investments and assets to support the implementation of SDGs and to provide them with knowledge and networks to enable their leaders to communicate with decision-makers and the public effectively.
5. A MFAC[6] was also launched in 2018, consisting of more than 40 religious leaders of faith-based organisations. The MFAC, which serves as a unique space for convening faith-based partners as advisors to the UN in their human rights, peace and security and sustainable development efforts, is committed to upholding multilateralism and international human rights through multifaith collaboration.

These initiatives aim to strengthen a global strategy to mobilise the various religions towards coherently implementing the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

The question, however, is not just whether but to what extent are specific[7] faith communities relevant nowadays in the discourse about the future of our planet and modern societies? What is the current state of affairs? This article intends to address the question by selecting appropriate recent literature (with the result of many – obviously reliable, primarily from the UN – Internet resources) and the subsequent interpretation and application.

However, this article has neither a comparative nor a phenomenological objective regarding religion(s).[8] As alluded to in the title, its venture point is a mere faith-based approach to our interconnectedness to the Earth.

Environmental protection and spirituality

Long before environmental protection became a priority for the international community, people worldwide had been taking care of their environment as an expression of their spiritual and cultural beliefs and values. For instance, this has remained embedded in the lives and practices of indigenous people, who, although they constitute only around 5% of the world population, play a vital role in nature conservation. Traditional indigenous territories are estimated to cover up to 22% of the world's land surface and host 80% of the planet's biodiversity (FAO 2017).

Nowadays, it is estimated that more than 80% of the world's population is somehow religiously affiliated (Hackett et al. 2012). This bears enormous consequences for addressing significant social challenges, particularly environmental protection. Many of the most important cultural heritage

2.See: https://www.unep.org/resources/annual-report/2020-annual-report-united-nations-interagency-task-force-religion-and#:~:text=The%20UN%20Interagency%20Task%20Force,%2F%2Dinspired%20civil%20society%20actors

3.See: https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/multi-faith-advisory-council-hosts-global-conference-on-75th-anniversary-of-the-united-nations/

4.See: https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/un-and-the-rule-of-law/united-nations-environment-programme/

5.See: https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment-programme/faith-earth-initiative/why-faith-and-environment-matters

6.See: https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/multi-faith-advisory-council-hosts-global-conference-on-75th-anniversary-of-the-united-nations/

7.The *Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion & Public Life* (PFRPL 2012) launched an effort to generate up-to-date and fully sourced estimates of the current size and projected growth of the world's major religious groups: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism. Other religions have been consolidated into 'other religions'. This article does not address the last group.

8.The brackets – thus both singular and plural – imply both a *theologia religionis* and a *theologia religionum* (cf. Beyers 2017:2–3).

sites worldwide are deeply rooted in local spiritual and cultural traditions, within which they are considered holy places (eds. Verschuuren et al. 2010). Religious institutions own more than 7% of the Earth's land surface, and a further 8% has religious connections (Hillmann & Barkmann 2009). As John Allen Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, founders of the *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology* (FORE),[9] point out: 'Sacred places also manifest these intimate relationships of a people to the land' (Grim & Tucker 2014:36).

Within religious ecologies, people can orientate and ground their relationships locally and globally. Moreover, a recent report by the *Global Impact Investing Network* (GIIN) (2020) has observed in a footnote of their statute that:

> [*W*]hile no specific figure has been estimated for total assets held by faith-based investors, there is strong evidence that illustrates vast accumulation of wealth by faith organizations. Shonil Bhagwat and Martin Palmer report that more than 7% of the Earth's land surface is owned by religious institutions (Nature, 'Conservation: the world's religions can help', news release, September 02, 2009). The 2018 Global Islamic Finance Report estimated the Islamic finance industry at USD 2.4 trillion at the end of 2017 (Arabian Business, 'Islamic finance industry grows 6% to be worth $2.4trn', news release, June 14, 2018) (n. 1).

Prominent religions have been tremendous powerhouses of ancient spiritual wisdom for millennia, guiding humanity through profound crises. Today, they remain amongst the most significant stakeholders for the planet, often securing educational, medical, welfare and compassion work in the most challenging environments.

We have seen several official statements and declarations from all the major faiths in the last few decades emphasising their commitments to a sustainable future. Such declarations show great respect for science teaching whilst appealing to sacred texts and spiritual practices to motivate ecological action. After an assessment of the different Christian confessions on the environment (e.g. *Laudato Si'*,[10] the Orthodox Churches' Statement on the Environment,[11] the Accra Declaration[12] and the Earth Charter[13]), Corneliu Simut (2020) concluded that:

> [*R*]egardless of whether they are Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic or mainline Protestant, confessional theologies about the state of nature and the environment have three main aspects in common: education, economy and politics. When these three are put together in a theological discourse, the result is a public theology of nature which is essentially ecodomic in nature. (p. 6)

The challenge is to develop viable solutions of a 'common public attitude about nature, which goes beyond confessional theologies and secular philosophies, [that] needs to be pursued globally in an ecodomic (constructive and edifying) manner' (Simut 2020:1). As Bauman, Bohannan and O'Brien (eds. 2017) said in the introduction of their book, *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*:

> However, when one looks closely at any religious tradition, one finds considerations of and connections to the natural world. The Buddha's enlightenment took place outdoors, under a bodhi tree; the Muslim Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible both repeatedly stress the importance of land in shaping and defining a community; the most sacred site on earth for many Hindus is the river Ganges, and many indigenous religious traditions are similarly centered on particular features of their local ecosystems; the parables of Jesus in the Christian scriptures frequently draw on images from the natural world, with mustard seeds, trees, seas, and wildlife featuring prominently. (Loc. 611)

In the Muslim world, the first official Islamic Declaration on Nature (Omar Naseef 1986) was promulgated in 1986 during the historic Assisi Conference, inaugurating an institutional commitment of the diverse Islamic world to the environment. In August 2015, a significant Islamic ecological event, the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium (IICCS 2015), was held in Istanbul to address environmental issues from a global Muslim perspective rooted in Islamic morals and legislation. Following this event, several Muslim environmentalists drafted an Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, resulting from a lengthy consultation process amongst Islamic scholars of various persuasions. The document[14] has been endorsed by several Muslim leaders, including the Grand Muftis of Uganda and Lebanon.

Indonesia, the largest Muslim country worldwide, has been at the forefront of environmental protection. In 2014, the Indonesian Council of Ulama, the most influential Muslim organisation in the country, took the unprecedented step of issuing an Islamic *fatwa*, or edict, requiring the country's 200 million Muslims to take an active role in protecting threatened species, including tigers, rhinos, elephants and orangutans as a part of their religious duty (MUI 2014). The *fatwa*, which was widely acclaimed in the world's media that week, is one of the first of its kind in the world, and it will be accompanied by an education programme to help communities put it into practice. Another *fatwa* followed in 2016, religiously banning 'the burning of forests and land that can cause damage, pollution, harm to other persons, adverse health effects and other harmful effects, is religiously forbidden (*haram*)' (MUI 2016).[15] Inspired by the Indonesian model, a *fatwa* against wildlife poaching[16] was passed in Malaysia in 2015 (David 2015). More recently, in collaboration with UNEP, work is underway to develop the Islamic environmental charter Al Mizan (UNEP 2021), which aims to link

9.See: https://fore.yale.edu/

10.See: https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf

11.See: https://www.acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/orthodox-churches-statement-environment

12.See: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/declaration_accra.2018-05-03.pdf

13.See: https://earthcharter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/echarter_english.pdf?x19816. The final text of the Earth Charter was approved at a meeting of the Earth Charter Commission at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2000. The official launch was on 29 June 2000 in a ceremony at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands attended the ceremony.

14.See: https://unfccc.int/news/islamic-declaration-on-climate-change

15.See: http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/haram-to-burn-forest-intentionally-says-indonesian-islamic-council

16.See: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/151216-fatwa-terengganu-malaysia-poaching

contemporary environmental issues with associated social and economic challenges to offer practical guidance in the light of Islamic teachings to individuals, communities and institutions.

Hinduism offers its wisdom on the stewardship of nature through two Hindu Declarations on Climate Change presented in 2009 and 2015 (Hindu 2009, 2015), affirming that 'the Hindu tradition understands that man is not separate from nature, that spiritual, psychological and physical bonds link us with the elements around us'. The declarations also state that the Hindus:

> [*H*]old a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature – the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space – as well as the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life's cosmic web. (n.p.)

However:

> [*C*]enturies of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us, and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. (n.p.)

These Declarations call upon Hindus to:

> [*T*]ake the lead in Earth-friendly living, personal frugality, lower power consumption, alternative energy, sustainable food production and vegetarianism, as well as in evolving technologies that positively address our shared plight. (n.p.)

It invokes (predictably, we might say) the cherished Hindu notion of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*,[17] 'the whole world is one family' (Hindu 2009:n.p., 2015:n.p.).

Cambodia has one of the highest rates of forest loss in the world. However, the Buddhist monks there have proved themselves powerful forces for conservation, acquiring legal protection of a 20 000-hectare forest, leading community patrol teams, raising environmental awareness and significantly reducing forest crime. Wrapping their saffron robes around tree trunks, the monks bless the trees and even ordain them as monks (Rick 2018).

In 2009, over 20 Buddhist teachers of all traditions presented the document *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency* (Stanley, Loy & Dorje 2009), followed in 2015 by a further declaration, *The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change* (Aiken 2015), composed as a pan-Buddhist statement by Zen teacher Dr David Tetsuun Loy and senior Theravadin teacher Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. With scientific input from Dr John Stanley and the Dalai Lama, Bhikkhu Bodhi was amongst the first to sign the document. The document emphasises that 'the threats and disasters we face ultimately stem from the human mind, requiring profound changes within our minds' (Stanley et al. 2009:165), and:

> [*O*]ur ecological emergency is a larger version of the perennial human predicament. Both as individuals and as a species, we suffer from a sense of self that feels disconnected not only from other people but from the Earth itself. (p. 9)

17.See: https://vedicglobal.org/vasudhaiva-kutumbakam/

Buddhist teachings emphasise that the overall health of the individual and society are intertwined with inner well-being and not just upon economic indicators, indicating the personal and social changes we must make. As the Vietnamese Thiền (i.e. Zen) Buddhist monk and activist Thich Nhat Hanh has said, 'we are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness' (Stanley et al. 2009:9):

> We need to wake up and realise that the Earth is our mother as well as our home – and in this case the umbilical cord binding us to her cannot be severed. When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her. (p. 10)

Exploiting the environment is harming us too. In 2012, Jewish organisational leaders signed a declaration setting a community-wide goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 14% by 2014. The *Jewish Environmental and Energy Imperative*, signed by 50 Jewish leaders 'across the political and religious spectrum', also establishes a goal of reducing Jewish community greenhouse gases by 83% of 2005 levels by 2050 – the national goal was announced by President Obama in Copenhagen – and it encourages a community-wide approach to greening synagogues, homes and buildings. The Jewish concept of *bal tashḥit* – a prohibition against wastefulness and destruction – is applicable in this debate. Against this backdrop, Tanhum Yoreh even draws an analogy between biocide and suicide (Yoreh 2019:33).

In the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis inspired more than 300 Jewish rabbis to sign a rabbinic letter on the climate crisis, 'calling for vigorous action to prevent worsening climate disruption and seek "eco-social justice"' (Shalom Centre 2015). They acknowledge 'God's creation, and we celebrate the presence of the divine hand in every earthly creature'. Drawing on the specific practices by which the Torah, in particular the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, refer to the idea of *Shabbat Shabbaton* – a sabbatical year – and *Shmittah* – a year of restful release for the Earth in which to 'set time and space aside for celebration, restfulness, reflection'. Brueggemann published an outstanding work on 'Sabbath as Resistance' as the practice ground for 'breaking the power of acquisitiveness and for creating a public will for an accent on restraint' (Brueggemann 2014:84–85).

A global religious alliance for the environment

In recent years, many religious leaders have called on their communities to care for our planet and its people. Amongst the first public contributions in environmental protection from a faith leader of particular significance has been that of His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. He has tirelessly promoted conservation care for over three decades, drawing from the Byzantine Church's rich spiritual and theological legacy. On the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on 01 September 2020, the 'Green' Patriarch clearly states how his effort is deeply rooted in the life of the Orthodox Church:

> We repeat that the environmental activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are an extension of its ecclesiological self-consciousness and do not comprise a simple circumstantial reaction to a new phenomenon. The very life of the Church is an applied ecology. (Bartholomew 2020)

The establishment of the Halki Ecological Institute is another innovative project of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, involving six representatives of the six countries bordering the Black Sea (cf. Chryssavgis 1999). The ecological crisis is not just an ethical dilemma but an ontological and theological matter that demands both a new way of thinking, a new way of being and a new way of acting. Be different and act differently!

In the 80s, as the international president of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the late Duke of Edinburgh, HRH Prince Philip, first envisaged 'a new and powerful alliance between the secular conservation organisations and faith groups'. In 1986, for the WWF 25th anniversary, he convened in Assisi leaders of Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity together with significant secular conservation and environmental groups to celebrate the respect for nature all the faiths have in common, the first-ever such meeting and a historic event (Suro 1986:36).

The success of this event led to the creation of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)[18] in 1995 to 'helping the major religions of the world to develop their environmental programmes based on their core teachings, beliefs and practices.' Subsequently, ARC joined forces with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2007 to further develop and support environmental work with the world's significant faiths by developing faith-based pledges of faith action called Long Term Commitments for a Living Planet aimed at achieving generational change. Some 30 concrete commitments from faith groups were presented in Windsor Castle in November 2009, ahead of Copenhagen's 2009 UN Climate Change (COP15).[19]

In 2015, ahead of the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, Pope Francis published the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home*, an urgent invitation to the Catholic Church and the whole world to take action on the environment 'before it is too late' (Pope Francis 2015:193). Francis suggests an approach of 'integral ecology', in which ecological issues are deeply intertwined with economic, social and cultural factors. With this document, the Pope expressed his desire 'to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home' (Pope Francis 2015:3). In particular, Francis (2015) addresses specifically people of faith to work together for the future of our planet, as:

> [*T*]he majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. (p. 201)

18.See: http://www.arcworld.org/

19.See: https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/past-conferences/copenhagen-climate-change-conference-december-2009/cop-15

Inspired by the encyclical letter, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) was born in 2015, subsequently renamed the Laudato Si' Movement (LSM) in the Summer of 2021. The movement:

> [*I*]s a first-of-its-kind international coalition of Catholics from many nations, continents, and walks of life. We are laity, religious, and clergy, theologians, scientists, and activists from Argentina, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Australia, the United States, and many other nations. We are united by our Catholic faith and our work in various roles and organisations on climate change issues. … Pope Francis will be issuing an encyclical about caring for the environment. With this statement, we the undersigned now seek to help bring these teachings of the Church to the world. (GCCM 2015:n.p.)

In 2019, FaithInvest[20] was created out of the growing interest in faith-aligned investing, which had been accelerated by the launch of the Zug Guidelines on Faith in Finance at the ARC 2017 meeting and by the realisation that the faiths, in combination, represent a significant investment force.

In the recent COP26 UN climate summit, Pope Francis and other religious leaders, including Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, issued a pre-COP26 appeal on climate change and made a public commitment to creating plans for the environment.

The pledge and the joined commitment to the environment were formalised on October 04, 2021, with the launch of the Faith Plans for People and Planet programme,[21] representing the most prominent and boldest environmental initiative to date by the global faith community.

Conclusions

For most people on our planet, spiritual values are vital in driving communitarian behaviour. With their emphasis on wisdom, social cohesion and interrelationships, religions can be a strategic player in ensuring effective integral human development. It is becoming increasingly clear that a lasting and effective social commitment must increasingly consider cultural, sociological and religious dimensions (McDonagh et al. 2021). In particular, the current environmental crisis has demonstrated how effectively religious communities have mobilised to respond to climate change. It is crucial to find ways to motivate individuals and communities to achieve a genuine ecological transition from their core values.

Religions remind us that in a world charged with notions of divinity, putting metaphysics aside in favour of trying to develop an ethic for the environment is impossible. All religions have some 'Golden Rule' – that you should do unto others as you would have them to do unto you, says Tanhum Yoreh, in an interview conducted by Jankovic (2020) (eds. McWilliams et al. 2019):

20.See: https://www.faithinvest.org/

21.See: https://www.faithplans.org/

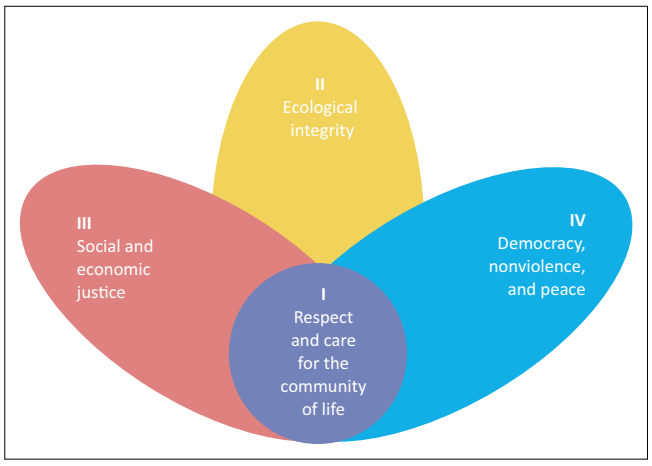
> There are multiple ways to reach a sustainable life for ourselves and the planet. And if some of these paths are within religion, then they need to be clear, well-articulated and accessible to the people who are going to gravitate towards them. (p. 556)

In the past, protected management and governance have been based on scientific research. Today we realise that a combination of science and spirituality can engage and empower an array of stakeholders from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

The extent of the relevancy of a faith-based approach in a comprehensive engagement with environmental issues is demonstrated in the work of the University of Zurich Centre for Sustainable Finance & Private Wealth (CSP n.d.), as well as in the University of Bern's project[22] on Ethics of a Planetary Sustainability by taking the space surrounding Earth into account when the sustainability of the planet is taken seriously. A plea for an extra goal of the United Nation's programme: 'our "space environment" is worth being integrated into the United Nations' SDGs as the 18th goal of its own, developing the Global Goals into a truly Planetary Plan' (Losch 2020:7)

The Preamble of the Earth Charter (ECI 2000) provided a graphical synopsis of this Earth-based interconnectedness, pleaded and demonstrated in this article[23] (Figure 1).

An inclusivist theology of religion(s) departs from theological exclusivism in its willingness to afford revelatory value to other religious traditions and, together with the natural sciences, engages in the enterprise to mitigate environmental degradation and strive towards a sustainable life for the whole of the creation. Fundamental integral ecology leads people to more just and sustainable lives. Faith-based enterprises are very much aware of this responsibility today. The UN and many governments are increasingly recognising the vital contributions of faith leaders and organisations in societal engagement, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, hypostasised in the Faith Plans for People and Planet programme, representing the most prominent and boldest environmental initiative to date by the global faith community.[24]



Source: Earth Charter International (ECI), 2000, *The Earth Charter*, viewed 20 November 2021, from https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/preamble/

FIGURE 1: The four pillars of the Earth Charter.

22.See: https://www.planetarysustainability.unibe.ch/the_project/

23.The guest-editor of this subsection of the HTS, 'Theology and Nature', used this same example in his introductory article to the collection (Buitendag 2020:1–2).

24.We should not underestimate the contribution of the Club of Rome and their acknowledgement of the role of faith in their 2050 vision (cf. Buitendag 2019, 2021).

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A.P. drafted a text after gathering relevant material and J.B. conceptualised and rewrote an argumentative text based on new sources with coherent conclusions.

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Disclaimer

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