

Making Ripples

Faith and Sustainability

by Amanda Bancroft

More often than not, faith and sustainability go together like peanut butter and jelly. While it's true that since antiquity religion has been used to justify abuses to the environment, it has also been a beacon towards care for creation – especially in recent times. From Interfaith Power and Light, to the Green Sanctuary program, to the Green Hajj pilgrimage, religions around the world are concerned about the environment, and for many of them this includes climate change.

Interfaith Power & Light is active in all but eleven states in the USA. Among many projects, they help retrofit places of faith to make the buildings more environmentally-friendly. Find out what's happening in Arkansas at ArkansasIPL.com. Another secular organization is the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC.org) which helps the world's major religions develop environmental programs on almost every continent. ARC helped build a Daoist Ecology Temple in Taibaishan in Central China, and has many other projects.

Buddhism emphasizes a foundation of environmental values like interconnection, creating a mindset that encourages cooperation between humans and nature. You can learn more about Buddhism and Science at MindandLife.org, which focuses on human development, compassion, and other topics.

The Unitarian Universalist non-creedal religion is also interested in ecology, mainly through the 7th of its 7 Principles which encourages “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part,” and through the Unitarian Universalist Association's Green Sanctuary program. The program accredits any UU congregation that fulfills the requirements for a more sustainable building and educational programming. Visit UUA.org/Environment for details.

There are now many Muslim environmental organizations, including the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES.org/uk) which is an international organization that “articulates the Islamic position on environmental protection.” At a 2010 conference on Muslim Action on Climate Change, Muslim environmental activists planned to promote greener Hajj pilgrimages to Mecca that banned plastic bottles. They offered workshops on ecology based on the Koran (which they plan to print on paper from sustainable sources), and are now designating eco-friendly mosques.

There are a large number of local, national and international Christian environmental organizations, including Evangelical Christian groups like the Evangelical Environmental Network (CreationCare.org) which accepts climate change and encourages clean energy. Some Christians fear that environmentalism is anti-human, or even that it's a religious threat stemming

from non-Christian religions. Some grapple with moral questions such as: If we respect creation, will it lessen respect for humans? If we grant animals the worth and dignity we believe belongs to humans alone, will it reduce human rights? If we give rights to more groups of people, won't it take away our own rights?

It's often been claimed that a bully needs to put others down in order to feel confident in their own superiority and self-worth. Our human worth and dignity need not depend on damaging the environment; to the contrary, a more mature, dignified and civilized society would operate as though respect for the Earth were common sense. The global interfaith picture concurs.

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