

By Mary Evelyn Tucker
Yale School of Forestry and
Environmental Studies &
Yale Divinity School

Ecology, Religion & Policymaking

Mary Evelyn Tucker



Survey of the Field

8

The environmental crisis has been well documented in its various interconnected aspects of resource depletion and species extinction, pollution growth and climate change, population explosion and over consumption. Each of these areas has been subject to extensive analysis by scientists, recommendations by policymakers, and regulations by lawyers. The emerging field of religion and ecology is playing a role in this. That is because world religions are being recognized in their great variety as more than simply a belief in a transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. Rather, religions are seen as providing a broad orientation to the cosmos and human roles in it. Attitudes toward nature thus have been significantly, although not exclusively, shaped by religious views for millennia in cultures around the globe.

In this context, then, religions can be understood in their largest sense as a means whereby humans, recognizing the limitations of phenomenal reality, undertake specific practices to effect self-transformation and community cohesion within a cosmological context. Religions thus refer to those cosmological stories, symbol systems, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical processes, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and responsibility, transformation and celebration. Religions connect humans with a divine presence or numinous force. They bond human communities and they assist in forging intimate relations with the broader Earth

community. In summary, religions link humans to the larger matrix of indeterminacy and mystery from which life arises, unfolds, and flourishes.

Certain distinctions need to be made here between the particularized expressions of religion identified with institutional or denominational forms of religion and those broader worldviews that animate such expressions. By worldviews we mean those ways of knowing, embedded in symbols and stories, which find lived expressions, consciously and unconsciously in the life of particular cultures. In this sense, worldviews arise from and are formed by human interactions with natural systems or ecologies. Consequently, one of the principal concerns of religions in many communities is to describe in story form the emergence of the local geography as a realm of the sacred. Worldview generates rituals and ethics, ways of acting, which guide human behavior in personal, communal, and ecological exchanges. The exploration of worldviews as they are both constructed and lived by religious communities is critical because it is here that we discover formative attitudes regarding nature, habitat, and our place in the world. In the contemporary period to resituate human-Earth relations in a more balanced mode will require both a reevaluation of sustainable worldviews and a formulation of viable environmental ethics.

A culture's worldviews are contained in religious cosmologies and expressed through rituals and symbols. Religious cosmologies describe the experience of origination and change in relation to the natural world. Religious rituals and symbols arise out of cosmologies and are grounded in the dynamics of nature. They provide rich resources for encouraging

spiritual and ethical transformation in human life. This is true for example in Buddhism, which sees change in nature and the cosmos as a potential source of suffering for the human. Confucianism and Daoism, on the other hand, affirm nature's changes as the source of the Dao. In addition, the death-rebirth cycle of nature serves as an inspiring mirror for human life, especially in the Western monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All religions translate natural cycles into rich tapestries of interpretive meanings that encourage humans to move beyond tragedy, suffering, and despair. Human struggles expressed in religious symbolism find their way into a culture's art, music, and literature. By linking human life and patterns of nature, religions have provided a meaningful orientation to life's continuity as well as to human diminishment and death. In addition, religions have helped to celebrate the gifts of nature such as air, water, and food that sustain life.

In short, religions have been significant catalysts for humans in coping with change and transcending suffering while at the same time grounding humans in nature's rhythms and Earth's abundance. The creative tensions between humans seeking to transcend this world and yearning to be embedded in this world are part of the dynamics of world religions. Christianity, for example, holds the promise of salvation in the next life as well as celebration of the incarnation of Christ as a human in the world. Similarly, Hinduism holds up a goal of moksha, of liberation from the world of samsara while also highlighting the ideal of Krishna acting in the world.

This realization of creative tensions leads to a more balanced understanding of the possibilities and limitations of religions regarding environmental

concerns. Many religions retain other worldly orientations toward personal salvation outside this world; at the same time they can and have fostered commitments to social justice, peace and ecological integrity in the world. A key component that has been missing in much environmental discourse is how to identify and tap into the cosmologies, symbols, rituals, and ethics that inspire changes of attitudes and actions for creating a sustainable future within this world. Historically, religions have contributed to social change in areas such as the abolitionist and civil rights movements. There are new alliances emerging now that are joining social justice with environmental justice.

In alignment with these “ecojustice” concerns, religions can encourage values and ethics of reverence, respect, redistribution, and responsibility for formulating a broader environmental ethics that includes humans, ecosystems, and other species. With the help of religions humans are now advocating for a reverence for the Earth and its long evolutionary unfolding, respect for the myriad species who share the planet with us, restraint in the use of natural resources on which all life depends, equitable distribution of wealth, and recognition of responsibility of humans for the continuity of life into future generations.

Clearly religions have a central role in the formulation of worldviews that orient humans to the natural world and the articulation of rituals and ethics that guide human behavior. In addition, they have institutional capacity to affect millions of people around the world. Religions of the world, however, cannot act alone with regard to new attitudes toward environmental protection and sustainability. The size and complexity of the problems we face require collaborative efforts both among the religions and in dialogue with other key domains of human endeavor, such as science, economics and public policy.

Religions in Environmental Thought and Practice

The potential and actual contribution of religions to environmental discussions and action is being recognized by a variety of persons and institutions within academia and beyond. Within the academic community, scientists such as E.O. Wilson at Harvard and Paul Erhlich at Stanford, as well as social scientists such as economist Richard Norgaard at Berkeley, and anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis at Harvard are acknowledging the important role of

religion and values in environmental studies and policy making. Environmental studies programs at major research universities including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, and Duke are seeking to complement their science and social science orientation with a humanities approach that draws on religious values and environmental ethics. Beyond academia, international civil

highlighted when Wangari Maathai in Kenya was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her Greenbelt Movement of tree planting that affirms the sacredness of creation.

Call for the Participation of Religions:

Religions were acknowledged by



Carpathian Willow

Photo: Vasile Nutu, Radacinesti, VL, RO

2007/03/31

9

servants and national policy makers are calling for religions to become involved with environmental protection and conservation. This effort ranges from United Nations leaders such as Klaus Toepfer, Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, and Mikhail Gorbachev, Director of Green Cross International, to Ministers of the Environment such as Masoomeh Ebtekar in Iran and Juan Mayr in Colombia.

In addition, in many parts of the world, grassroots projects, such as tree planting and river restoration, are illustrating the effectiveness of religiously based groups to initiate and support local environmental efforts. Some examples of this include river clean up of the Ganges and the Yamuna Rivers in northern India, the ordaining of trees to protect them by monks in Thailand, and the efforts to plant trees by an alliance in Zimbabwe of the traditional Shona people along with the African Zionist Churches. (There are 100 such projects documented on the Harvard web site www.environment.harvard.edu/religion) These grassroots efforts to insure the integrity of ecosystems are being recognized as essential to long term peace and security of nations and local communities. This was especially

scientists in the early 1990s as having an important role to play in revising a sustainable future. They recognized the importance of religion as key repositories of deep civilizational values and indispensable motivators in moral transformation around consumption, energy use and environmental protection. Two important documents were issued by scientists calling for collaboration with religious leaders, lay persons, and institutions.

One is the statement of scientists titled “Preserving the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion” which was signed at the Global Forum meeting in Moscow in January 1990. It states: “The environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in public policy, but in individual behavior. The historical record makes clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment. As scientists, many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish

continued on page 10

Ecology, Religion and Policymaking

continued from page 9

the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred.”

A second document is called “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity.” This was produced by the Union of Concerned Scientists in 1992 and signed by over 2,000 scientists including more than 200 Nobel Laureates. The document also suggests that the planet is facing a severe environmental crisis and will require the assistance and commitment of those in the religious community. It states: “a new ethic is required – a new attitude towards discharging our responsibilities for caring for ourselves and for the Earth. We must recognize the Earth’s limited capacity to provide for us. We must recognize its fragility. We must no longer allow it to be ravaged. This ethic must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant leaders and reluctant governments and reluctant peoples themselves to effect the needed changes.”

Response of Religious Leaders and Communities:

The response to these appeals was slow at first but is rapidly growing. It might be noted that there were some strong voices advocating a religious response over half a century ago. These included Walter Lowdermilk, who in 1940 called for an Eleventh Commandment of land stewardship, and Joseph Sittler, who in 1954 wrote an essay titled “A Theology for the Earth.” Likewise, the Islamic scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has been calling since the late 1960s for a renewed sense of the sacred in nature drawing on perennial philosophy. Lynn White’s essay in 1967 on “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” sparked controversy over his assertion that the Judeo-Christian tradition has contributed to the environmental crisis by devaluing nature. In 1972 the theologian, John Cobb, published a prescient book titled, *Is It Too Late?*

Over the last two decades some key movements have taken place among religious communities that have shown growing levels of concern and commitment regarding alleviating the environmental crisis. Some of these include the interreligious gatherings on the environment in Assisi under the sponsorship of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1984 and under the auspices of the Vatican in 1986. The Parliament of

World Religions held in Chicago in 1993 and in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1999 issued major statements on Global Ethics embracing human rights and environmental issues. The 1993 statement on Global Ethics was formulated by the Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, who continues to pursue efforts in this regard through his institute in Germany. The 1999 Parliament in Cape Town issued a challenge to lead institutions (educational, economic, political) to participate in the transformation toward a sustainable future.

The Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary leaders held international meetings in Oxford in 1988, Moscow in 1990, Rio in 1992, and Kyoto in 1993, which had the environment as a major focus. Since 1995 a critical Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC) has been active in England and in Asia for environmental protection and restoration. Similarly, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE) has organized Jewish and Christian groups on this issue in the United States. The Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) has activated American Jewish participation in environmental issues. In August 2000 a historic gathering of more than 2,000 religious leaders took place at the United Nations during the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders where discussions of the environment was one of four major themes.

Several major international religious leaders have emerged as strong spokespersons for the importance of care for the environment. The Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nat Hanh, have spoken out for many years about the universal responsibility the human community has toward the environment and toward all sentient species. Church leaders, such as the Anglican Archbishop, Rowan Williams, and Robert Edgar, President of the National Council of Churches, USA are

pointing to environmental problems, such as resource use and climate change, as major ethical challenges. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, has sponsored a series of symposia at sea that have brought together scientists, religious leaders, civil servants, and journalists to highlight the problems of marine pollution and fisheries depletion. These have included symposia on the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Adriatic, and the Baltic, as well as the Danube River. The symposium on the Adriatic concluded in Venice with a joint statement signed by both the Patriarch and Pope John Paul II on the urgent need for environmental protection and care for nature’s resources.

It is now the case that most of the world’s religions have issued statements on the need to care for the Earth and to take responsibility for future generations. These statements range from various positions within the western monotheistic traditions to the different sectors within Asian traditions of Buddhism and Daoism. By no means monolithic, they draw on different theological perspectives and ethical concerns across a wide spectrum. They reflect originality of thought in bringing religious traditions into conversation with modern environmental problems, such as climate change, pollution, and loss of biodiversity. Within the various denominations of Christianity, for example, the Protestant-based World Council of Churches has published treatises on “justice, peace, and the integrity of creation”; the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew has issued statements on destruction of the environment as “ecological sin”; the Evangelical community has published letters and position papers calling for care for creation; the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines issued a pastoral letter on the environment; and the American Catholic Bishops have published several statements on ecology, including a letter on the Columbia River bioregion. These statements are being used as a moral call to engage in further action on behalf of the environment. Many of them can be viewed on the Harvard web site www.environment.harvard.edu/religion

CERTIFICATE IN

Science and Religion

is awarded by the Science and Religion Advisory Committee of the Schools of the Boston Theological Institute in recognition of demonstrated engagement and study of Science and Religion in the following tracks:

1. Religion and Natural Sciences;
2. Religion and Bioethics;
3. Religion and Ecology; and
4. Religion and Cognitive Sciences.

For further information please call 617.527.4880 or email: btioffice@bostontheological.org

Intellectual Influences on Religion and Ecology

It is within this global context that the field of religion and ecology has emerged within academia over the last decade. While it is still a relatively new field that is defining its scope, the academic study of religion and ecology is drawing on other disciplines and thinkers to develop theoretical, historical, ethical, cultural, and

engaged dimensions. Among many thinkers some of the theoretical and historical foundations have been laid by key philosophers. These include Clarence Glacken who developed a study of nature in western culture and Arne Naess who drew on Baruch Spinoza and South Asian thought to elaborate a theory of deep ecology emphasizing the primacy of the natural world over human prerogatives. Other philosophers and ethicists such as Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston have helped to develop the field of environmental ethics. The cultural dimensions are influenced by the work of anthropologists, such as Julian Steward who coined the term “cultural ecology” to describe the relations between the environment and the economic and technological aspects of society. Furthermore, anthropologist Roy Rappaport extended cultural understanding of the ways in which ritual sustains social life in specific bioregions. The geographers David Soper and Yi Fu Tuan have investigated the spatial and ecological characteristics of religion.

Historians such as Thomas Berry and William McNeill provided a perspective from world history for understanding the mutual influences involved in human interactions with ecosystems. Theologians such as John Cobb and Gordon Kaufman have brought together theoretical and engaged perspectives by suggesting ways in which Christian beliefs can be more effectively expressed theologically and in environmental action. Ecofeminists such as Rosemary Ruether, Sallie McFague and Heather Eaton have illustrated the contested nature of the treatment of the Earth and the exploitation of women. Ecojustice writers such as Robert Bullard, Dieter Hessel, and Roger Gottlieb have also made important contributions to understanding the linkages between social injustice and environmental pollution. In many of these thinkers the theoretical, historical, ethical, cultural and engaged perspectives are not separate but mutually inclusive. It is, however, appropriate to distinguish these approaches as they are currently informing the emerging field of religion and ecology.

These approaches are animated by several key questions. Theoretically, how has the interpretation and use of religious texts and traditions contributed to human attitudes regarding the environment? Ethically how do humans value nature and thus create moral grounds for protecting the Earth for future generations. Historically, how have human relations with nature changed over time and how has this been shaped by religions? Culturally, how has nature been perceived

and constructed by humans and conversely how has the natural world affected the formation of human culture? From an engaged perspective in what ways do the values and practices of a particular religion activate mutually enhancing human-Earth relations? What are the contributions of ecofeminist or ecojustice perspectives to a sustainable future? These questions and others have been raised by individuals and groups as the field began to take shape over the last decade.

A comprehensive theoretical and historical examination of religious traditions and ecology was undertaken by historians of religions, theologians, and environmentalists in the Harvard conference series on World Religions and Ecology. At the same time constructive theologians, such as Jay McDaniel and Catherine Keller, and engaged ethicists, such as Larry Rasmussen and Ron Engel, have been working to formulate an expansion of religious and ethical sensibilities across time (intergenerational) and across space (to include other species and the planet as a whole). In addition, there has emerged a lively exploration of responses to nature experienced as sacred outside the religious traditions in so-called “nature religions” by Catherine Albanese, Bron Taylor, and Graham Harvey.

The Emerging Academic Field of Religion and Ecology

The emergence of an academic field of religion and ecology over the last decade is marked by a number of key efforts of individuals and groups. This includes conferences organized, forums created, web sites constructed, books published, courses taught, and undergraduate and graduate programs that have been created. All of this can be seen within the larger context of the humanities, which are now making significant contributions to environmental studies.

Harvard Conference Series

From 1993 – 1995 the Boston Theological Institute, in partnership with the North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology, the Union of Concerned Scientists, The American Association for the Advancement of Science and with funding from the Pew Foundation, brokered a series of conferences with religious and academic leaders on the topic of religion and ecology. From 1996 – 1998, a three-year international conference series took place at Harvard Divinity School Center for the Study of World Religions. The goal was to examine the varied ways in which human-Earth relations have been conceived in the world’s religions. The

project was launched to provide a broad survey that would help to ground a new field of study in religion and ecology. It was not intended to be exhaustive but rather suggestive of the wide variety of resources – intellectual and engaged - to draw on from the world’s religious traditions. Recognizing that religions are key shapers of people’s worldviews and formulators of their most cherished values, this research project, uncovered a wealth of attitudes and practices toward nature sanctioned by religious traditions.

Acknowledging the gap between ancient texts and traditions and modern environmental challenges, it drew on a broad method of retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction. The intention was to avoid simplistic eco-friendly or apologetic readings of scriptures written in vastly different times and circumstances. The scholars were engaged in critically retrieving aspects of the religious traditions for reexamination and reevaluation in the contemporary context. This has been part of the dynamic unfolding of religions historically as they have struggled to balance orthodoxy with the urgencies of adapting to new circumstances or cultures. Religious traditions have never been monolithic, but rather have embraced a broad range of interpretive positions ranging from Orthodox to reform. Discerning appropriate change and the abiding value of tradition has been an important part of the life of religious teachers for centuries. Jewish rabbis, Christian theologians, Islamic imams in the west and Hindu pundits, Buddhist monks, and Confucian scholars in Asian have all been involved with interpretation of their respective traditions over time. The Harvard project drew on that ongoing process of discernment so as to move toward a constructive phase. In the constructive phase the scholars of the various religions could point toward actual or potential sources of ecological awareness and action from within the particular traditions.

The Harvard conferences were also designed to foster interdisciplinary conversations that drew on the synergy of historians, theologians, ethicists, and scientists as well as on the work of grassroots environmentalists. This synergy proved to be indispensable as it provided a dynamic open space for fresh conversations. An awareness emerged that religion and ecology was a new field of study that was being created in both dialogue and in an ongoing network of exchange. The openness of the discussions was also enhanced by the fact that there were no “experts”, as

continued on page 12

Ecology, Religion and Policymaking

continued from page 11

participants were discovering new approaches together. A spirit of collaborative scholarship rather than individualistic research emerged naturally in the conferences. This was in part because participants realized there was not one way forward, but multiple possibilities that each of the religions might contribute. Moreover, there arose a remarkable sense that cooperative efforts for the future of the planet were more valuable than the claims to a superior perspective from one tradition or from one scholar. Individual traditions, scholars, and projects were seen as part of larger and long-term efforts for the flourishing of life on the planet for future generations.

Thus, with this spirit of engagement, from 1996-1998 over 800 scholars participated in a series of ten conferences examining the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto and Indigenous religions. The conferences were organized by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim with a team of area specialists in the world's religions. Each of the conferences was designed to include a spectrum of positions ranging, for example, from Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform in Judaism, from Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Evangelical in Christianity, and from Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana in Buddhism. The conferences were also intended to embrace both historians and scholars of the traditions along with religious spokespersons for the traditions. Moreover, scientists, environmentalists and activists as well as graduate and undergraduate students were invited. Each conference included plenary sessions for a broader public. A wide range of funders insured that participants could be brought from around the world. This attempt at breadth and inclusivity resulted in some remarkable gatherings and some inevitable challenges. The Indigenous conference had representatives from every continent and from numerous ethnic groups. The Shinto conference was the largest gathering of Shinto priests and practitioners ever to occur outside of Japan. The Islam conference, with representatives across the Islamic world, fostered lively discussions over differences between Sunni and Shiite interpretations of jurisprudence.

The edited papers from these

conferences have been published in ten volumes by the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions and distributed by Harvard University Press.

The purposes of the conferences and books were:

To examine varied attitudes toward nature from the religions of the world with attention to the complexity of history and culture.

To contribute to the articulation of functional environmental ethics grounded in religious traditions and inspired by broad ecological perspectives.

To stimulate the interest and concern of religious leaders and lay people as well as students and professors of religion in seminaries, colleges, and universities.

This research project assumed that religions could contribute toward a more sustainable future, but that multidisciplinary approaches were needed. With this assumption in mind, three culminating interdisciplinary conferences were held in the fall of 1998 at the American Academy of Arts and Science in Cambridge and at the United Nations and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. These conferences included scientists, economists, educators, and policy makers as well as scholars from the various world religions. The journalist Bill Moyers interviewed the religious scholars to highlight the insights from their particular perspectives for a sustainable future. Maurice Strong, Secretary General of the Stockholm and Rio UN environmental conference and Timothy Wirth, Director of the United Nations Foundation participated in the conferences. Other participants included from the field of science, Jane Lubchenco, past president of the AAAS, from economics and policy, Ismail Serageldin, of the World Bank, from higher education, George Rupp, President of Columbia University.

The cultural historian, Thomas Berry, and the cosmologist, Brian Swimme, spoke from the perspective of the evolutionary story of the universe and our current environmental crisis.

Forums

In October 1998 at the United Nations conference the formation of the Forum on Religion and Ecology was announced. It had three objectives: to continue the research in the area of religion and ecology, to foster the development of teaching in this area, to encourage outreach within academia to interdisciplinary environmental studies programs and outside of academia to religious and policy groups. It has since grown into a global network of some 5000 people and is coordinated by Mary Evelyn

Tucker and John Grim.

Since the initial Harvard conferences, the Forum has continued its research agenda by organizing several other Harvard conferences on World Religions and Animals, (resulting in a volume titled *Communion of Subjects*, Columbia University Press, 2006) on the Ecological Imagination with leading nature writers, and on World Religions and Climate Change that resulted in a *Daedalus* volume (2001). www.amacad.org/publications/fall2001/fall2001.aspx

In addition, the Forum convened a multiyear summer seminar on cosmology and religion with scientists Brian Swimme, Ursula Goodenough, George Fisher, Barbara Smuts, and Terry Deacon. Moreover, to promote teaching religion and ecology the Forum has sponsored workshops for college and high school teachers.

Internationally, the Forum has encouraged outreach by organizing panels at the Parliament of World Religions in Capetown and Barcelona as well as at environmental conferences in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. It has participated in the symposiums on the Aegean, Baltic and Amazon convened by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew. It has worked with the United Nations Environmental Programme on various projects, and participated in two symposia they organized in Iran. It has also been involved in the Earth Charter movement through workshops in North America and international conferences in South America and in Europe. Mary Evelyn Tucker was a member of the Earth Charter International Drafting Committee and is now a member of the Earth Charter International Council.

In 2003 a group of Canadian scholars, including Heather Eaton, James Miller, Anne Marie Dalton and Stephen Scharper, formed a Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology (CFORE). They have been active in Canada in developing the field of study, as well as in sponsoring talks and workshops and participating in public forums and radio discussions. www.cfore.org They are sponsoring a book series on religion and ecology from the University of Toronto Press.

Web sites

A web site was created by the Forum on Religion and Ecology under the Harvard Center for the Environment (www.environment.harvard.edu/religion) to assist in fostering research, education and outreach in the area of religion and ecology. To encourage research there are annotated bibliographies of the literature

on the world religions along with selections from sacred texts and environmental statements from the world's religious communities. There are posted examples of some 100 grassroots religiously inspired environmental movements around the world that illustrate the engaged practices in this area.

To enhance teaching, the web site contains introductory essays to each of the world's religious traditions and their environmental contributions. It posts syllabi and lists audiovisual resources. It links to the high school teacher's web site in this area: Religious studies in the secondary schools- www.rsiss.org

To illustrate the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue in partnership with science, economics, and policy the web site contains introductory sections on each of these areas. An annotated bibliography of the evolutionary and ecological sciences is posted, along with bibliographies of ecological economics and ecological ethics.

Publications

The academic literature has been growing rapidly and interest among students at both the secondary and collegiate level has been robust. The ten volume *Harvard series on World Religions and Ecology* edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim was published between 1997-2003. This involved key area specialists in the world religions and 100s of scholars and environmentalists. Two years later another major multiyear project was completed with the publication of the two volume *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* edited by Bron Taylor. This has been years in production, has involved hundreds of scholars, and makes an invaluable contribution in identifying the many approaches, topics, and movements included in religion and ecology. www.religionandnature.com A Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture has emerged out of this effort and the first conference was held at the University of Florida in April 2006.

In addition, two significant anthologies have been edited by Roger Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth* (2004) and Richard Foltz, *Worldviews and Environment* (2003). Two journals were established, one titled *Worldviews: Culture, Religion and the Environment* and the other called *Ecotheology*. Moreover, the published literature in each of the world's religions on this topic – both books and journal articles - has increased exponentially over the last decade. An important indication that the field of religion and ecology is now established within religious studies is the fact that the revised Macmillan *Encyclopedia of Religion*

(2005) includes a new section on this area with a dozen articles on the topic.

Courses

The courses in religion and ecology are spreading across North America and there are now several graduate programs offering concentrations in this area of study. These include the University of Florida at Gainesville, the University of Toronto, Drew University, and the University of Hawaii. Within the American Academy of Religion the Religion and Ecology Group has been active in sponsoring panels and convening planning meetings since 1993. High school teachers in private schools have taken up the field with enthusiasm and helped to sponsor workshops on the topic, develop courses, review books, and create a web site.

Humanities contributions

The emergence of a field in religion and ecology is part of a broader movement within other branches of the humanities over the last 30 years to contribute in various ways to environmental studies. Environmental philosophy and ethics have grown in size and significance. Nature writing – both prose and poetry – has developed so that an academic society and various journals (such as *Orion*) have emerged in this area. Environmental historians are researching topics ranging from studies of cities or bioregions (William Cronin) or countries (Vaclav Smil) to wider surveys of periods (John McNeill) or civilizations (Clive Ponting). The arts have also made significant contributions to reflection on the environment and human interaction with it. Many scholars involved in religion and ecology are in dialogue with other humanists who are exploring the contributions of the humanities to environmental studies and policymaking.

Challenges to Religion and Ecology

As the field of religion and ecology emerges within academia and beyond it is clear that religions offer both promise and problems for ameliorating environmental issues. Religions have sustained human aspirations and energies for centuries, but they have also contributed to intolerance, violence, and fundamentalist views of various kinds. The world's religions may thus be seen as necessary but not sufficient for ecological solutions. Religions have their problematic and dogmatic tendencies and have been late in coming to recognize the scale and scope of the global environmental crisis.

There are limits, then, to what religions may contribute to solving environmental

problems. One example of these limits is the issue of population. Some of the religious traditions have presented recurring obstacles to open discussion of certain kinds of birth control at UN population conferences. These religious groups are associated largely with Islam, Roman Catholicism and evangelical Christianity. However, there is an alternative research project identifying a more plural approach among world religions to population control. Led by Daniel Maguire at Marquette University this project is called the "Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics."

Hence while noting that religions may at times be problematic there is also recognition that religions may bring a broadened ethical perspective to environmental issues. There is a felt need for creative humanistic and religious initiatives so as to formulate more interdisciplinary approaches to environmental science, policies, law, and economics. The directors of many environmental studies programs at leading universities in the United States are understanding this and exploring ways to integrate religion and ethics into traditional science and policy based programs. At the same time these directors of environmental programs are trying to define the parameters of scholarship and public service. Should environmental programs be simply centers of research? To what extent should they be arenas for debating public policy or even advocating certain environmental policy approaches?

Analogous questions are arising in the field of religion and ecology as it begins to define itself and seeks to be in dialogue with science and policy. Should religion and ecology simply be a scholarly field of historical or theoretical research apart from contemporary issues? How should it relate to science and policy concerns? Should it pursue engaged scholarship such as eco-justice? What, if any, is the role of advocacy within academia? Can academics be engaged scholars or public intellectuals in the environmental field within academia and beyond? These are potentially creative and healthy tensions that have emerged in the field of religion and ecology.

The pressing nature of the environmental crisis is urging some scholars within academia to become public intellectuals who are contributing to the understanding of environmental problems and pointing toward possible solutions. This debate on the role of academics engaged in environmental studies and policy-making crosses the disciplines from

Ecology, Religion and Policymaking

continued from page 13

the sciences and social sciences to the humanities. Many people are calling on higher education and research universities to make a larger contribution to the solution of environmental problems. It is at this lively intersection between theoretical, historical, and cultural research and engaged scholarship that the field of religion and ecology is growing.

The Limits of Science and Policy

The field of religion and ecology is becoming well situated to make a contribution to interdisciplinary environmental studies within academia as well as to be in conversation with scientists and policy makers outside of academia. In analyzing the current global environmental situation leaders from both science and policy fields are wondering why we have not made more progress in solving environmental problems. Over the last 50 years, the enormous contributions of science to our understanding of many aspects of environmental problems, both global and local, is being fully recognized.

However, while thousands of scientific studies have been published and then translated into policy reports, many experts have concluded that we have not made sufficient progress in stemming the losses of ecosystems and species. We are stymied by a range of obstacles from lack of political will to unchanging human habits. For many environmentalists there is a growing realization that a broader sense of vision and values is missing.

Scientists are noting that dire facts about environmental problems, as overwhelming as they may be, have not altered the kinds of human behavior that is rapaciously exploiting nature. Nor have such facts affected human habits of addictive consumption, especially in the richer nations. Moreover, policy experts are realizing that legislative or managerial approaches to nature are proving insufficient to the complex environmental challenges at hand. One cannot simply legislate change or manage human nature.

In short, environmentalists are observing that while science and policy approaches are necessary, they are not sufficient to assist in transforming human consciousness and behavior for a sustainable future. They are suggesting instead that values and ethics, religion and spirituality are important factors in this

transformation. This is being articulated in conferences, in books and articles, and in policy institutes like Worldwatch. Here is where the field of religion and ecology is beginning to make an important contribution both to environmental studies within the academy and to policy initiatives outside the academy.

Response of Policy Groups and Scientists:

One such initiative has been promoted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which has established an Interfaith Partnership for the Environment that for some 20 years has distributed thousands of booklets on *Earth and Faith* for use in local congregations and communities. It has encouraged the participation of religious leaders, scholars, and lay people in conferences that it has organized. Klaus Toepfer, the Executive Director has called for environmental ethics and spiritual values to be more actively integrated into environmental protection. He draws on Hans Jonas' principle of responsibility as crucial for future generations. He notes that legal and compliance mechanisms are indispensable, but a more holistic approach to environmental issues is needed. He has suggested, for example, that resources, such as water, should not be seen as simply economically important for human use but also spiritually valuable. In this light, he cites the need to develop indicators for assessing not just market values but spiritual and ethical values as well. Toepfer has been instrumental in encouraging this broader ethical approach in many international conferences. These include two conferences that UNEP organized in Tehran in cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2001 and May 2005.

A conference in Lyon in 2001 chaired by Mikhail Gorbachev also reflected this search for broader ethical approaches to environmental problems. Its title was: "Earth Dialogues: Is Ethics the Missing Link?" This Earth Dialogue conference was followed by another in Barcelona in 2004 where religious and ethical issues were also prominent. While not looking for quick solutions or easy answers, many thoughtful people are observing that human motivation, values, and action are critical in making the transition to a sustainable future.

Think tanks such as the Worldwatch Institute in Washington DC are also realizing that statistics and alarming reports are not enough to help initiate the changes for an ecologically sustainable world. In the final chapter of the

Worldwatch *State of the World 2003* report senior researcher, Gary Gardner, wrote of the growing role of religions in shaping attitudes and action for a broader commitment to environmental protection and restoration. His essay received significant attention and the larger version of the chapter is published in a separate Worldwatch Paper (#164) titled "Invoking the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World." Gardner also published a book in 2006 on world religions and sustainable development called *Inspiring Progress*.

There are several prominent scientists and policy makers who are recognizing that human values and ethical perspectives need to be part of the equation in environmental discussions. They are noting that arguments from "sound science" and computer models that draw on reams of data and statistics do not necessarily move people to action. The Harvard biologist, E.O. Wilson, in his book *On the Future of Life* (2003) observes the potential power of religious beliefs and institutions to mobilize large numbers of people for ecological protection. In this vein, James Gustave Speth, the Dean of Yale's School of Forestry, in his book, *Red Sky in the Morning* (2004) acknowledges that ethics and values will need to play a larger role in environmental discussions.

The Stanford biologist, Paul Ehrlich, voiced similar concerns in an address to the Ecological Society of America in August 2004. He observed that, "For the first time in human history, global civilization is threatened with collapse." Thus, he suggests, "The world therefore needs an ongoing discussion of key ethical issues related to the human predicament in order to help generate the urgently required response." He observed that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report was undertaking an evaluation of the conditions of the world's ecosystems. He noted, however, that "There is no parallel effort to examine and air what is known about how human cultures, and especially ethics, change, and what kinds of changes might be instigated to lessen the chances of a catastrophic global collapse." He called for the establishment of a Millennium Assessment of Human Behavior (MAHB) to address these problems.

In the 30-year anniversary edition of *Limits to Growth* in 2004 Dennis Meadows and his colleagues observe that we need new "Tools for the Transition to Sustainability." The authors admit, "In our search for ways to encourage the peaceful restructuring of a system that naturally resists its own transformation we have tried many tools. The obvious ones are –

rational analysis, data systems thinking, computer modeling, and the clearest words we can find. Those are tools that anyone trained in science and economics would automatically grasp. Like recycling, they are useful, necessary, and they are not enough." (p. 269) Instead, they suggest qualities beyond the usual frame of environmental science and policy in mapping the road toward sustainability, namely in planning for a future that will sustain the life needs of humans and other species. The qualities for ensuring such a future include visioning, networking, truth telling, learning, and loving. These qualities indicate a major shift for social planners and policy-oriented environmentalists. The authors identified the importance of such "soft tools" in 1992 but now feel that they are not simply optional but rather they are essential for the transition to sustainability.

Conclusion

It is becoming increasingly clear that environmental changes will be assisted by a variety of disciplines in very specific ways: namely, scientific analysis will be critical to understanding nature's ecology, educational awareness will be indispensable to creating modes of sustainable life, economic incentives will be central to adequate distribution of resources, public policy recommendations will be invaluable in shaping national and international priorities, and moral and spiritual values will be crucial for the transformations, both personal and communal, required for the flourishing of Earth's many ecosystems. All of these disciplines and approaches are needed. In this way, the various values, incentives, and knowledge that motivate human activity can be more effectively channeled toward long-term sustainable life on the planet. It is in this nexus that the field of religion and ecology is making important contributions, within academia and beyond.

"God's UNFINISHED FUTURE: Why it Matters Now"

Episcopal Divinity hosted the Trinity Institute Conference by simulcast, "God's Unfinished Future: Why it Matters Now" on January 22, 2007. The conference, which took place at Trinity Church Wall Street, was simulcast to a number of locations throughout North America. Beginning with an opening Eucharist at which James Carroll of the Boston Globe was the preacher, conference keynote speakers included Professor Jürgen Moltmann, the Rev. Barbara Rossing, Th.D., and the Rev. Professor Peter J. Gomes. The keynotes and panel discussions were interwoven with theological reflections in small groups, led by facilitators. Persons from the BTI and EDS helped with local discussions at EDS.

The focus of the conference and its discussions was on ways to appropriate Christian "eschatology," perceived as more prescriptive of "God's Unfinished Future" than descriptive of an end-game as marked out in the best-selling "Left Behind" series of novels. The point of the conference was that issues of "last things" are common concerns for all Christians as well as the wider religious community. Jürgen Moltmann, emeritus professor of theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany, spoke for many when he noted that at the core of theology were the principles that human consciousness is not shaped only by the past and present but also by anticipation of the future, that biblical revelation is centered on God's promises, and that hope for the future does not rest on extrapolations of past or present trends but on something truly beyond them, namely those divine promises. Exhibiting little patience for a wrathful God that would chastise the world with famine, epidemic and earthquake, Moltmann called such a God "a world terrorist." He went on to argue, "The image of the God who judges in wrath has caused a great deal of spiritual damage." Not satisfied with an eternal destiny simply the matter of an individual's own choice, Moltmann and the other speakers went on to argue for a corporate human destiny in which God calls us to co-create a more humane world in the face of environmental, nuclear, terrorist and other challenges.

In this way, Moltmann argued, we put Jesus Christ at the center of this final drama. "It is high time to Christianize our traditional images and perceptions of God's Final Judgment." The goal of a final judgment, in this interpretation, is not reward and punishment but victory over all that is godless, which he called "a great Day of Reconciliation." ~~~ RLP

THE 3RD ANNUAL ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS GRADUATE STUDENTS CONFERENCE IN PATRISTIC STUDIES

at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology
Brookline, Massachusetts | March 15-17, 2007

On March 15-17, 2007, The Stephen and Catherine Pappas Patristic Institute of the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology held its third annual Archbishop Iakovos Graduate Student Conference in Patristic Studies. The purpose of this annual conference was to bring graduate students together from the fields of Patristic Studies, Historical Theology, and the History of Christianity in Late Antiquity in a collaborative and theological setting to hear and discuss peer research.

"Evidently, this conference meets a clear need among masters and doctoral students who are focusing their studies on ancient Christianity," says Dr. Bruce Beck, the Associate Director of the Institute that sponsors the annual conference. The number

of accepted papers grew from 36 last year to 47 this year, with about 65 students in attendance for the three-day event on the campus of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline. The number of students coming from outside the U.S. grew significantly this year, with six coming from Europe and seven from Canada.

Fr. Robert Daly, professor emeritus at Boston College and head of the Institute's board of directors, welcomed the conference attendees saying "your being here validates what we do here at the Pappas Patristic Institute; it is what we are all about, supporting the future of patristic studies here in North America and abroad."

Following the conference, Adrian Guiu, a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, wrote the following encouraging note: ...Be

assured that your graduate conference is one of the best experiences I have had as a graduate student." Another participant, Daniel Larison, also from the University of Chicago, wrote "I have only been to a few other conferences so far, but this was by far the most enjoyable and profitable experience I have had at a conference. I look forward to submitting a proposal for next year's gathering."

Next year's graduate student conference will be March 13-15, 2008. Paper proposals are requested by February 1, 2008.

If you would like to see the list of papers presented, see www.pappaspatristic.hchc.edu, or contact Dr. Bruce Beck by email at: beck.bruce@comcast.net ~~~

Founded in 2003 by a generous grant from the late Stephen Pappas and his wife Catherine, the goal of the Pappas Patristic Institute is the advancement and promotion of primarily Greek and other eastern patristic studies in the service of the academy and of the Church.

BB