



**Faith
Voices
for
Ecocide
Law**

End Ecocide Sweden

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***Together we
can activate a
law to protect
the Earth***



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Dedicated to Earth lawyer Polly Higgins, who dared us all to be great.

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Introduction

In this time of multiple environmental crises, humanity is at the crossroads. There is no way we can achieve sustainable development if we don't protect the living systems of the Earth. Many religious traditions emphasise this responsibility, in other words: the ability to respond. Now, when mass damage and destruction of nature is happening on a global scale, we urgently need to respond to the ecological crisis. The word *ecocide* – literally “killing one's home” – conveys this understanding. We need new rules for the protection of nature at international level, to hold ourselves collectively responsible to prevent ecocide.

A broad alliance of religious leaders from over 40 countries and 12 religions, convened by UNEP Faith for Earth, called for this powerful and necessary move at the Stockholm+50 conference in 2022. Half a century after the first international conference on the environment, they call on governments and UN entities to adopt and implement a fifth crime at the International Criminal Court: a crime of ecocide. Further, they encourage faith-based organisations to promote the Faith for Ecocide law: an interreligious initiative gathering religious and spiritual leaders and communities to express support for an international crime of ecocide.¹

This is a remarkable collection of texts drawing on the vast wisdom, teachings and practices of the world religions and indigenous spiritual traditions. It focuses on the relationship between humans and the rest of the living world in general, and in particular on the need for a new crime of ecocide. *Mary Evelyn Tucker* draws on 25 years of work on the intersection between religion and ecology. She writes that affirming the dynamic, interrelated dimensions of life itself is the basis for the prevention of ecocide. This means a revaluing of nature as a source of life, not a resource to be exploited. Tucker also directs to valuable resources

to strengthen this – in the words of Thomas Berry – Great Work. Any damage carried out to the environment is also damage to ourselves, write *Jamie Cresswell* and *Michele Lamb*. Establishing a law of ecocide will not only provide criminal accountability to those who are responsible for acts of ecocide, but also create an arena for the sort of dialogue which Buddhism advocates. This is crucial to fulfill humanity’s desire to live in peace and security. *Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad* draws from the Quran, positing that the natural world is “luminous with transcendence”. Religions can significantly contribute to the conventional materialistic discourse on climate change and conservation with a re-enchantment of our vision. Ecocide, from this perspective, is a crime against not just our physical but our spiritual natures: an epistemicide. *Rabbi Yonatan Neril* echoes this: faith can and should help us to address the roots of our planet’s ecological crisis. He describes the need for religions to integrate scientific and ecological findings into their preaching, teaching, and living; as well as the potential of religious belief and understanding to move people worldwide to environmental action in a way that science cannot.

All theology now must be eco-theology! exclaims Archbishop emeritus *K G Hammar*. The calling to transform the world into a liveable place inevitably starts with the renewal of our thinking. An inward transformation is thus the condition for the outward transformation, to a community that includes all that exist on their own conditions, he writes. *H H Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati*, in his speech from the launch of the Faith for Ecocide law initiative, highlights ecocide as a crime against our duty to respect and revere Mother Nature. From a Hindu perspective, love and law must go hand in hand, and ecocide law is not only necessary, but our dharmic responsibility. *Reverend James Bhagwan* gives a perspective from one of the most vulnerable regions of climate change, the Pacific. He introduces a new ecological framework for development, which integrates economical, ecological and ecu-

menical aspects. It draws on ancient wisdom from reading the stars and travelling across the mighty ocean in giant canoes, an understanding which considers human beings as belonging to, rather than owning, land and sea. An international law of ecocide would provide the necessary legal provision for this reframing, a basis for envisioning possible alternative futures. Sámi Noaidi and wisdom mother *Helene Lindmark* speaks about the relationship between the health of the land and the health of the people: when the forests are exploited, people get sick, and the wisdom stored in the landscape is destroyed. *Appolinaire Oussou Lio*, practitioner of endogenous Vodun tradition from Benin, introduces animism: a system in which God and nature are one, through the sacred place “Zekpon Adonɔ”. Sacred places like this exist all over the Earth, and they help us to respect and revere the living world. Law needs to reflect this ancient knowledge and support community in the largest sense: the community of life.

It is time to unite in the understanding that we are all embedded in the living systems of this planet, and time to raise our voices for the respect and protection of nature. Religions carry the unique gift of hope that this response-ability can be developed in time. Across the world, humanity has developed a dazzling diversity of faith traditions and ways of worshipping and celebrating life. This volume contains perspectives from a few of them. These distinguished faith leaders and indigenous wisdom keepers each draw on the wisdom of their own tradition, yet the essence of their message is the same: *to protect our common home, ecocide must become an international crime.*

Together we can activate a law to protect the Earth.

**Join the Faith for Ecocide Law initiative at
www.faithforecodelaw.earth**

Ecocide: legal definition

In 2021, Stop Ecocide Foundation convened an independent expert panel of lawyers with expertise in criminal, environmental and climate law to propose a definition of the crime of ‘ecocide’ within the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.²

ARTICLE 8 TER ECOCIDÉ

1. For the purpose of this Statute, “ecocide” means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.
2. For the purpose of paragraph 1:
 1. “Wanton” means with reckless disregard for damage which would be clearly excessive in relation to the social and economic benefits anticipated;
 2. “Severe” means damage which involves very serious adverse changes, disruption or harm to any element of the environment, including grave impacts on human life or natural, cultural or economic resources;
 3. “Widespread” means damage which extends beyond a limited geographic area, crosses state boundaries, or is suffered by an entire ecosystem or species or a large number of human beings;
 4. “Long-term” means damage which is irreversible or which cannot be redressed through natural recovery within a reasonable period of time;
 5. “Environment” means the earth, its biosphere, cryosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere, as well as outer space.

Faith for Ecocide law Manifesto

WE, AS PEOPLE OF FAITH,

- are deeply concerned about the ongoing destruction of our home, the Earth.
- demand a global response to prevent mass damage and destruction of ecosystems: ecocide.
- support creating legal protection for life on Earth by including ecocide as a crime against peace under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

We are in the Anthropocene

AS HUMANITY, we are in a position we have never been in before. We are in the Anthropocene. We have an impact on the whole planetary system, and Nature is sending us warning after warning. Our collective actions are damaging to life on a global scale. Ecocide is happening every day. The climate is changing. Polar ice is melting and seas are rising. Every day, entire species are disappearing from the face of the Earth, never to return. Many of us have forgotten that we are not separate from Nature but a part of life on this planet, and that when we damage Nature, we damage ourselves.

Humanity is at the crossroads. The human species has an impact on the whole planetary system. The development pattern we follow today, built on an extractive economy, is not applicable any more when we know that there are planetary boundaries³ and that we are transgressing those boundaries. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security,

health and quality of life on a global scale.

The health of the ecosystems on which we, and all other species, depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. The most ambitious assessment of the global state of nature yet undertaken, by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) states that an average of around 25 percent of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened, implying that around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken.⁴

During the last decades, hundreds of conventions and treaties regarding the environment have been adopted, but the degradation of ecosystems continues at an increasing rate. The Convention on Biodiversity, where most of the states of the world cooperate for Nature, has missed all of its set targets.⁵ It is calling for a transformation in society's relationship with Nature. Humans are totally dependent on healthy ecosystems for our fundamental needs. Thus, human rights, including the basic rights to life, health, food and water, are inextricably linked to Nature.⁶ Nature's contributions to people affect almost every aspect of life and are essential to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals; Nature is at the heart of sustainable development.

We can be healers

AS HUMANS, we have the ability to contemplate who we are and what we experience. The ecological crisis is an existential crisis, a crisis of understanding our place in the world. For thousands of years, faith traditions have provided humanity with narratives, to understand who we are. As people of faith, we embrace a worldview that includes those who came before us and those who will come after. Mother Earth, or the Creation, has always provided us with everything we need: air to breathe, water to drink and food to eat. We need to respect and protect the Earth for our home to

remain hospitable, abundant and beautiful into the future. We have the choice now, to become healers, caretakers, and participants in the living whole. To shift the relationship between humanity and nature from harm to harmony.

Laws and regulations are built on ethical presumptions about what is good and bad. Faith traditions often provide the wells from which these values are coming. Values for the protection of the vulnerable are found in many traditions. And now our home, Mother Earth, is in need of protection too.

Today's laws do not protect Nature and they do not protect those who defend Nature.⁷ Ordinary people trying to protect their homes and livelihoods, standing up for the health of our planet, have their land violently grabbed to produce goods consumed across the world. More than four environmental defenders are murdered every week, with attacks driven by industries like mining, logging and agribusiness. Many more are threatened, arrested, forced from their lands or thrown in jail for opposing governments or companies seeking profit. Indigenous communities are facing disproportionate risks of violence, and simultaneously hold a key role in protecting biodiversity. Indigenous territories encompass up to 22 percent of the world's land surface and they coincide with areas that hold 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity.⁸

Ever growing production and consumption doesn't match with a finite world. Even if the gifts of the planet are sufficient for all, we face great injustices and a large gap between those who have and those who have not. When we allow destruction of the biosphere we all share, it is the world's poor people and future generations who will suffer most. As people of faith, we embrace a worldview that includes those who came before us and those who will come after. We need the law to reflect and support this understanding, to protect the living whole on which we depend and to enable a transformation of society towards careful partnership with Nature instead of careless exploitation.

We need new rules to abide by

AS PEOPLE OF FAITH from all around the world, we demand a global response to prevent ecocide. To live in peace with each other we must live in peace with the Earth. The rules of our societies are laws, and we can change them to protect what is precious. In the Anthropocene we need a duty of care: law at the very highest level to protect the Earth. We need ecocide to become a crime against peace at the International Criminal Court, among the other crimes of concern to the whole international community.

The world is a living, sacred whole, not just a resource open to exploitation. In a global economy, we need global rules to protect the sacred. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is where the most serious crimes, of concern to the whole international community, are being addressed. It has been in operation since 2002 and currently lists four crimes: Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes, and Crimes of Aggression. The Statute can be amended to add a fifth crime: ecocide.

Ecocide means mass damage and destruction of ecosystems – harm to nature which is widespread, severe or systematic. ‘Eco’ derives from the Greek *oikos* meaning house or home and ‘cide’ – from the Latin *caedere* meaning strike down, demolish, kill. In other words “killing our home”. The crimes prosecutable by the ICC are often referred to as crimes against peace. Damage, destruction or loss of ecosystems leads to resource depletion, which in turn leads to conflict and ultimately war. Humanity has seen the importance of international laws to ensure that offenders are held accountable. The principle of ‘superior responsibility’ in international law holds those who are in a position of power responsible for their actions. It imposes a duty of care on people who make decisions that affect humanity as a whole.

Over billions of years, life has evolved on the beautiful planet we inhabit. As humanity, we share this planet with each other and

all other living beings. It is our only home. Today, when humanity is behind the steering wheel of the future, we need a shift towards a global understanding of respect and reverence for Mother Earth, or the Creation. We need the law to support such a shift. As people of faith from all around the world, we call on our leaders to create a duty of care, by amending the Rome Statute to make ecocide an international crime.

***“Together we strive to end
ecocide and heal the Earth.
We are the temples, churches,
pagodas, mosques, synagogues,
cathedrals and sacred sites all
around the world. With faith,
hope, love and care for our
common future!”***

INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE:

On the need for a new Earth Ethics

Mary Evelyn Tucker

Many of us are particularly concerned about a fresh and more comprehensive ethical basis for a flourishing Earth community. Some 40 years ago our teacher Thomas Berry would say we have ethics for homicide, suicide and even genocide, but not biocide or ecocide. Finally we are expanding the basis for ethics, with such a valuable discussion as this on interfaith perspectives on ecocide law. I thank all of those who have helped foreground this issue. This includes the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who in 1997 spoke out regarding crimes against Creation and ecological sin. Pope Francis is aligned with Bartholomew's work and his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, has been a major step forward in creating a more robust basis for eco-justice. *The Earth Charter* issued in 2000 and the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Nature* in 2010 are also important documents in the movement towards an international law on ecocide. Let me begin with some comments on world religions and ecology as a source of a new Earth Ethics to prevent ecocide. I will be drawing on the 25 years of work directing the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology with my husband, John Grim.

All of the world's religions have views of nature that form the basis for how various cultures value nature. We need to include these perspectives along with science and technology, economics

and business, policy and law. These are all necessary, but not sufficient without the ethical and spiritual basis of the world's religions regarding care for the environment and compassion for those suffering the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. In response to the question of how we humans can coexist with nature in a mutually enhancing way, John Grim and I organized a series of 10 conferences on world religions and ecology at Harvard from 1996–1998. From these we identified common values from the world's religions for a broader environmental ethics that could stem the tide of ecocide. We call them the 6 Rs.⁹

1. Reverence for the Earth and its profound ecological processes
2. Respect for Earth's myriad species and an extension of ethics to include all life forms
3. Reciprocity in human-nature relations
4. Restraint in use of natural resources
5. Responsibility of humans for the continuity of life
6. Restoration of ecosystems for the flourishing of life

All of this involves a revaluing of nature as a source of life, not a resource to be exploited. We dwell amidst a living Earth community, not on top of dead matter. This is the basis for the prevention of ecocide—affirming the dynamic, interrelated dimensions of life itself. Indigenous peoples have understood this for millennia.

This involves highlighting the intrinsic value of nature—not only its use to humans as implied in the concept of ecosystem services, which monetizes nature in relation to humans. Economic value should be balanced with intrinsic value. Certainly, a circular ecological economy is a positive trend that is emerging and many people are supporting this, including Sámi leader, Eirik Myrhaug. This can include the perspective that Thomas Berry advocated:

“Earth is a communion of subjects; not a collection of objects.” Everything is alive, is kin, and is interacting with everything else. We live in a communicative symbiotic world, as indigenous peoples have known. This worldview is also present in the Asian religions. Berry helped us understand this aliveness of the world in the cosmological and ecological dimensions of the world’s religions. Let me give a few examples from the East Asian religious traditions:

CONFUCIANISM – Triad of cosmos, Earth and human where humans are co-creators with the universe and Earth working to enhance the fecundity of nature and society.

DAOISM – Human is the microcosm of the macrocosm where humans cultivate themselves in relation to the dynamic movements of cosmos and Earth. There is a recognition that mutual wellbeing depends on healthy ecosystems.

BUDDHISM – The radical interdependence of all life forms, humans and more than humans, is highlighted by Buddhism from its origin and through its spread across Asia. All the schools of Buddhism recognize this and many provide mediational paths to enhance this interconnection. Thich Nhat Hahn speaks of this as “interbeing”.

With these cosmological values and ecological principles in mind, there are numerous examples from the religious communities of grassroot environmentalism. We have created a database to collect these in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme Faith for Earth, the Parliament of World Religions and United Religions Initiative. *Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals* covers a wide range of projects focusing on climate change, energy, water, consumption, life below water, and life on land.¹⁰

“All of this involves a revaluing of nature as a source of life, not a resource to be exploited. We dwell amidst a living Earth community, not on top of dead matter.”

Some examples of religiously based engaged projects:

- In India the Chipko movement in the foothills of the Himalayas began with Hindu women hugging trees to prevent them from being cut down. This was to honor the *shakti*, sacred life force, in the trees and to ensure that deforestation did not contribute to landslides. In other parts of India tree saplings are offered from various Hindu temples to encourage reforestation.
- In southeast Asia Buddhist monks in Thailand and Cambodia have been ordaining trees to ensure their protection against logging.
- In 2019 the Sikh community has pledged to plant 1 million trees across the world.
- In Africa Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in creating the Greenbelt Movement that encouraged women to plant trees. She was inspired by both her Kikuyu indigenous tradition and her Catholic belief in the sacredness of Creation.

In addition to the world's religions, we are also looking to science – especially evolutionary science and ecology – for a more comprehensive understanding of the universe and the Earth that has given rise to life in all of its diversity and complexity. With-

out this perspective we can't create a full-bodied ecological ethics for the shared future of the Earth community. This is why we made the *Journey of the Universe* film and book¹¹ in response to Thomas Berry's eloquent call for a New Story in 1978. He knew that cosmology and ecology, science and values needed to be interwoven for an integrated evolutionary story, as an antidote to ecocide. *Journey of the Universe* weaves the findings of modern science together with enduring wisdom found in the humanistic and religious traditions of the West, of Asia, and of indigenous peoples. Scientific facts and poetic metaphors are interwoven so that we can understand how we arose from these creative processes and participate in them. With that deep time perspective we can create a cosmological and ecological ethics for our planetary future. Within this cosmological perspective we can ask: What is humankind in relation to 13.7 billion years of universe history? What is our place in the framework of 4.6 billion years of Earth history? How can we foster the continuity and the integrity of life processes? How can we prevent ecocide?

***“With that deep time
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Journey of the Universe is both an inspiring story and a functional cosmology, as it harnesses the energy of awe and wonder for the multiple efforts of humans to contribute to the flourishing of the Earth Community. This is what Thomas Berry called the Great Work, in which humans will become a mutually enhancing presence for Earth's systems and societies. Our present time of “Great

Transition” or “Great Turning”, is calling forth new principles and perspectives, policies and practices. Indeed, there are hundreds of thousands of people around the planet who are participating in this transformative work for improved systems of energy and technology, agriculture and food, economics and politics, education and the arts. I hope you will join in the Great Story that gives a context for the Great Work still ahead for the flourishing of the Earth Community. Clearly, we need such a comprehensive evolutionary story, along with the values from the world’s religions, to prevent ecocide.

INDIGENOUS SÁMI PERSPECTIVE:

The drum is the heart-beat of Mother Earth

Helene Lindmark

My family carries nature and especially the forest within us. We have been caring for the forest for generations. As we see it, there is no separation between us and nature; we are children of nature. Nature has been our home and our survival for so many generations. This heritage has gone through my family. My grandfather was both the priest and the healer of the village, but the last part was hidden and not spoken about. I'm a Noaidi, carrying the call of the roots, the spirits, my ancestors, my heritage. I also called myself a Wisdom mother; I carry the voice of Mother Earth. It is an honor to be a bearer of the Sámi heritage, but it is also difficult. When our lands are exploited, we get sick. I have had problems with my heart and lungs. We have seen the forests being destroyed and dying for such a long time.

The village I come from, Liikavaara, will not remain. Right now, the mine is taking it. This is very painful for me and my family. When a place is exploited, all the wisdom which is stored in that place gets destroyed. And it does not matter how much we build; it is not through new industries that we live, it is not these that nourish and heal us. Working with the wisdom traditions of Europe is very important. This wisdom is lost today, due to division and war. I can feel the confusion when I travel, people are seeking, they are sad and lost, they feel that something is wrong.

The question I have is this: how much do we need? What is important? According to me, we have everything we need, if we really look deep within. If we can find ourselves, maybe we can also find other values. We can understand that we are the water. There is no separation between a lake or the sea, and us, we are also water. The water is the river of life, it is where we grow and are cradled into this world.

To carry two worlds, the indigenous world and the industrial world, was not easy as a child. My dad sent me to the forest and said: you have to come home. Day after day I went to the forest and I came home and cried, I did not understand. My dad said to me: Helene, you have to listen, you don't understand. You have to come home to yourself.

***“There is no separation
between a lake or the sea, and
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is the river of life, it is where we
grow and are cradled into
this world.”***

The drum is the heartbeat of Mother Earth. That rhythm is the first longing of the child. The drum is my medicine. I have chosen my calling as a wisdom mother. I have grandchildren who are going to walk this Earth, and I cannot let them go through what is now happening – there won't be anything left. I grew up as one with nature. I had never thought in my life that my home would be destroyed. This destruction affects whole families. I will never be able to show my grandchildren the place I was born; it will be gone. Few people know this is happening; to me it is important

to make people aware that also here up north, nature is being destroyed. I see my relatives getting sick now because the Earth, the forest is being taken, exploited. The mining which is taking my village will operate for maybe 10–12 years. Then it will turn into a dam. Nowadays, we consume, consume and consume. We have to activate the memories within, come home to ourselves and understand what we do to ourselves when we live in this materialistic society. We need material things, but there has to be a balance. we cannot continue to just take at any cost. In our culture, we only take what we need and we are careful to also give back, to the soil, to the landscape, to the animals we hunt. There are no boundaries between the spiritual beings and the material world.

Making ecocide a crime is a brilliant idea. When we destroy nature, we destroy our people. There is no protection at all today. They say: there are so much resources up north, we are just taking this little piece. But what happens to everything that is connected to that little piece? Mother Earth can carry on, but for us, we are really at risk. I am in touch with people in Brazil, in the Amazon, and what is so frightening is that it is the same companies behind the exploitation over there. What are the driving forces? Power, money and control. But at what price? We see increasing amounts of pollution and disease. There is no other way than to protect Mother Earth. She is carrying us and feeding us, and there will be generations coming after us. We have to take responsibility for them.

We are also affected by global processes like climate change. The Arctic is heating much faster than the planet as a whole, and we can already see the effects. We live with the eight seasons, we are dependent on them, it is a complex relationship with the animals and the plants. We see the change with our own eyes, it is so fast. The seasons are out of sync.

For thousands of years nature has been our home, but we have forgotten. The spiritual world in the Sámi culture has been so

suppressed; there is a lot of fear. You have to be very careful. Many people carry a burden from colonialism. It has led to division between people. It is important to show respect and to understand that a lot of trauma, from generations, can be stirred. Punishment for practising our traditions has been so harsh. The long history of the drum and the joik has almost been taken from our tradition and our heritage. I try to gently convey that spirituality is not something separate, but a part of who we are. We know how powerful the Earth is, we know that the water, the mountains, and Mother Earth will protect us. There is a respect beyond anything. Before we hold ceremony, we have to ask the land first. We enter into conversation with the elements, with the water and the mountains, with the drum.

“There is no other way than to protect Mother Earth. She is carrying us and feeding us, and there will be generations coming after us. We have to take responsibility for them.”

I carry Her voice. I mediate. I know when to speak and when to be silent. I am in service to Her. I am conveying energy now from Liikavaara, for healing. I try to touch people in the heart. What I do cannot be explained logically; the day I can do that, it will be gone. It is beyond explanation. Part of walking this path is to feel, to experience, and it is tough. I want to find the keys to make people understand that nature is part of who we are, but also how nature is part. How is it alive within us, how can we long into it?

It is difficult to put words on this tradition, it is not to be found

in books. My work is about having trust in the process, in the service. I am just a tool; there is so much I don't need to know. I just have to be grounded, and be in connection with and honour Mother Earth. It is about holding an awareness about what I do, what nature is and about the elements. The forest is my healing space. I breathe and I get what I need. We take water for granted, but water is sacred, it is life. We could not live without it. We have to reach people, with gentleness and an open heart, with storytelling, with a curiosity about who they are. We have all come to this world and we all have a longing and memories.

HINDU PERSPECTIVE:

From a greed culture to a green culture

HH Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati

It is beautiful to see so many of us coming together to make ecocide an international crime. To me, it is a green crime. This is the need of the hour. In Sanskrit, in our scriptures, it is said beautifully: the Earth is our mother. We are her children. What happens to her, happens to us. To me, ecocide is suicide. Ecocide is genocide. When we hurt the planet, we hurt ourselves. We hurt our coming generations. It is like cutting the roots of the tree that is ultimately sustaining us. If the roots are cut, we are gone. When we hurt the Earth, when we pollute our trees and deforest our forests, we are hurting our present and our future. In the pandemic, so many of us saw that when we go into lockdown, our rivers, trees, Mother Nature and Mother Earth are able to heal and revive. It is the tragedy of our times that we need to be inside, in order for nature to be healthy. But it doesn't have to be like this. We can make the change and we must change this.

One of the core tenets of Hinduism is that the world is one family. Our world family is not only all human beings but all living beings. We are intricately connected. We are joined together, we are linked and locked together. We need to understand that we are not masters of nature, but merely custodians.

But merely the custodians. Our scriptures have always taught us to revere and to respect Mother Nature. Hurting the Earth and

exploiting our natural resources is violence. It is a green crime. Our scriptures speak of Ahimsa, non-violence. Dharma is very important and non-violence is the greatest Dharma, not exploiting and over-extracting our natural resources is our ultimate duty. This is our pure duty and we must follow that. Hence, in the face of an ecological crisis, international law is not only necessary, but our dharmic responsibility, our dharmic duty. Essentially, love and law must go hand in hand. It is much needed for us to include a fifth crime, ecocide to be added to international criminal law alongside war crimes, crimes of aggression, crimes against humanity and genocide.

“To me, ecocide is suicide. Ecocide is genocide. When we hurt the planet, we hurt ourselves. We hurt our coming generations.”

Mahatma Gandhi said it so beautifully: there is always enough for every man's need and never enough for any man's greed. We have to draw the line between greed and need. We have to move from a greed culture to a green culture. We have to move from a greed culture to a need culture. We have to move from a use and throw, to a use and grow culture. Today, we have lost the ability to discriminate between our need and greed. We have to understand that, and we have to draw the line. The corona virus has given us a great opportunity to focus and take care of three things: our culture, our nature and our future. First, culture; not individual cultures, based on countries or religions, but our global culture of humanity and oneness, our culture of togetherness. Second, our nature; very important. Mother Earth is healing; when we go

inside, she heals. This shows us that we are the problem. Let us be the solution also. Today it is covid; tomorrow it will be something else. Even today, so many millions of people are dying each year, due to air pollution and water pollution. Even today, so many more are dying of these than of covid. When our air is polluted, our water is polluted—how can we be healthy? Last, our future; certainly, everyone is very worried about the future. What will happen to us, to our loved ones, what will happen to our jobs, to our security, to our food, to our economy? Our economy cannot be sustained without sustainable development. This is true, and this fact must be understood by all. Let us create a green economy, an economy where all can be healthy, all can be fed, all can be healed.

As religious leaders and faith communities we must be the change and also bring the change. We must bring the light in this time of darkness, and be the light. Faith leaders can play a very important role in reversing climate change and ensuring sustainable development. We must inspire our congregations and our communities to be the solution because the time to act is now. The future is in our hands and it depends on how we live in the present. To me, togetherness, oneness and inclusiveness are the greatest mantras for the 21st century. Let us be together and work together, walk together and bring peace together, bring solutions together. God bless you.

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We are intricately connected.”***

BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE:

Opening a treasure house of possibilities

Jamie Cresswell and Michele Lamb

What is happening to our planet? Across the world, we see mass environmental damage and destruction. Ecocide is the term which *Stop Ecocide International* (SEI) have used to describe this. It literally means ‘killing one’s home’. Who is responsible? What should we do? SEI has been campaigning since 2017 to add ecocide to the existing international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression. This would make ecocide an arrestable offence. It would make individuals, who are seen as being responsible for acts and decisions leading to severe environmental harm, liable to prosecution.

What can Buddhist teachings bring to this initiative? This is the question that we have been tasked to consider. We welcome the opportunity to begin a dialogue on how Buddhist teachings can specifically respond to the establishment of ecocide as a crime and its corollary imposition of punishment, between and within Buddhism, and with those of other faiths and none. Whilst Buddhists are involved in many forms of activism through such initiatives as EcoDharma and XR Buddhists, the Buddhist perspective on ecocide is, as yet, less well developed. We begin our discussion by clarifying a Buddhist perspective on the relationship between human beings and the natural world and environment. We will then go on to discuss ways in which this relationship can inform three

essential elements required for the fight against ecocide: an understanding of the relationship between inner spiritual transformation and social and political activism; ways in which Buddhism can be put into action against systemic and structural foundations of the climate crisis; and finally how Buddhist philosophy can respond to the use of criminal sanction and specifically the fifth crime against humanity – ecocide.

Buddhism and the self, nature and humanity

Nature, or the environment, is not something out there, separate from us. We are nature, we are the environment. Any damage carried out to the environment is also damage to ourselves. Everything that we rely on as humans, is in some way derived from nature, whether clothes, food, buildings, fuel, or our own bodies, made as they are of the same elements that make up oceans, land and plants. Ultimately, from the Buddhist perspective, we are not merely custodians of the Earth, answerable to a creator; rather we are one with the Earth – the Earth is more than our home. We are not only ‘killing our home’ as inferred in the definition of ecocide cited above; rather, in destroying our planet, we are killing ourselves. We are instigating and participating in an act of collective self-harm.

Writing from within the tradition of Zen Buddhism, David Loy argues that ‘... we must realise that the environment is not simply the place where we live, but rather it is the basis of our lives and our being. We are not part of nature, we are nature’.¹² He concludes, ‘The environment is not merely an “environment” – that is, not only the place where we happen to be located. Rather, the biosphere is the ground from which and within which we arise.’¹³

This perspective is in marked contrast to much of the post-enlightenment historical and religious ways of thinking which posit a hierarchical system of nature with humans at the top, potentially allowing the freedom to use and overexploit the natural world.

For Buddhism, this is a profoundly mistaken idea. It leads not only to devastating damage to forests, seas, land, and animals, but also to ourselves.

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Further, such dualistic ways of thinking have led humans to consider themselves as distinct individuals, with separate and distinct selves. Buddhism, originating as it did in a very different time and culture, presents a non-dual understanding, in which humans, animals and plants are all part of the same ecological system. In the Nichiren tradition of Japanese Buddhism, the concept of *Esbo Funi*, means the non-duality of the person and the environment. The apparent separation which we experience is an illusion; the inner life and the exterior world are interpenetrating.

The *Avatamsaka Sūtra*¹⁴ presents a wonderful metaphor for the interconnectedness and interpenetration of all things. It is known as Indra’s net. This net or web hangs above the world and at each knot or eye sits a brilliant, perfect jewel. There are infinite jewels, each jewel reflecting every other jewel. Whatever affects one jewel affects all others. This is reality as perfectly interpenetrating. Each individual phenomenon perfectly reflects all other phenomena and the ultimate nature of existence. The metaphor illustrates the

interdependence of all phenomena. Everything contains everything else. At the same time, each individual thing is not hindered by or confused with all the other individual things. Though not understood to be physical realities, these jewels are an illustration of reality as a complex web of reflections and interconnections.

Buddhadasa Bikkhu, a monk in the Thai Theravada tradition lays it out clearly in this passage:

The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and the earth. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative. When we realise that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering and death, then we can build a noble, even a healing environment. If our lives are not based on this truth then we'll all perish.¹⁵

“Our misunderstanding of the fundamental non-duality at the core of all life leads to a sense of separation between humans and their environment.”

Our misunderstanding of the fundamental non-duality at the core of all life leads to a sense of separation between humans and their environment. ‘The ego, self as we experience it, is a psycho-social-linguistic construction. This opens up the opportunity for deconstruction and reconstruction’¹⁶ and additionally ‘consciousness is not that of an individual self but rather that the sense of self, is one of the ways in which consciousness manifests.’¹⁷ This leaves

open the possibility of a radical transformation in the hearts and minds of people, from destruction to creativity or from passivity to Buddhist inspired climate activism.

Buddhist activism and the Ecosattva movement

It is unfortunate that Buddhism is often mistakenly regarded as a passive teaching and that whilst Buddhism's diagnosis of the fundamental issues at stake in the climate crisis may be sound, its ability and willingness to engage socially and politically in addressing that damage, has been regarded as limited. However, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni repeatedly urged his followers to focus not on theory but on action, both as individuals and collectively. From this perspective, Buddhism has always contained a social and political dimension, developed particularly strongly both in Asian and Anglo-European contexts since the 1940s. This has led to the growth of a specific movement known as Socially Engaged Buddhism, a broad arena of activism covering many areas of ethical action including political, social, ecological, transformational, personal, and cultural.

Those who engage in such action aspire to live as Bodhisattvas, a term used to describe a person who has vowed to dedicate themselves to act for the good of others and the world, believing that there can be no authentic Buddhism without ethical action. Social and political engagement in Buddhism is essential to the process of personal awakening that Buddhists seek to realise as individuals and to the establishment of a compassionate and just society that would be the outcome of such a collective awakening. Nichiren, the Japanese Buddhist monk, makes clear the interconnectedness between personal awakening and social activism in his treatise addressed to the ruling authorities of 13th century Japan: "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquility throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?"¹⁸

A more recent configuration of Bodhisattva action, and one directly connected to climate activism is the emergence of the Ecosattva movement: those who have chosen to express the activism inherent in the Bodhisattva way through environmental activism.

Transforming the poison at the roots of the climate crisis

The Buddhist concept of the Three Poisons (*akuśāla-mūla Skt. Sandoku. jp.*) or unwholesome roots of mind—lust or greed, ill will or anger and ignorance or delusion. It is a teaching found in many Buddhist traditions, and directly addresses the systemic and structural foundations of the climate crisis. The teaching originates in the *Fire Sermon (Āditta-pariyāya Sutta)*:¹⁹ “Monks, all is burning... Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust (greed), with the fire of hate (ill will), with the fire of delusion (ignorance).” The metaphor of fire clearly characterises the potency of these unwholesome qualities of mind, experienced individually and collectively. The transformation of these poisons, both institutionally and individually is central to the practice of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

The poison of delusion is the ignorance or misunderstanding of the fundamental nature of reality. It is not perceiving life as being interconnected, instead believing that phenomena are fixed and permanent and clinging to a false understanding of the self in order to protect and elevate it. This delusion then leads to ill will and greed. Loy argues that today we have institutionalised these three poisons. The economic system has institutionalised greed in its pursuit of continual growth. The military has institutionalised ill will, and corporate media has institutionalised political and consumerist delusions that support the other two.²⁰ As a result, the capitalist and profit-led economic system is always looking for more profit and more consumption. This continual illusion

of growth is unsustainable and has led to the devastating overuse of the natural resources of the world, and horrendous ecological disasters.

However, Buddhism has a spiritual response to the three poisons – we are not without power. We are able, if we so wish, to transform such delusion, greed and ill will through cultivating *kuśala-mūla* or advantageous roots. These are generosity, loving kindness, and wisdom. The big question now is, how do we make institutional, as well as individual changes, given that institutions have shown themselves incapable of doing so? Based on the concept of interpenetration which we have discussed previously, Buddhism proposes that individual, personal practice, will have an effect on the world around us. Socially Engaged Buddhism begins with a process of inner transformation that enables the development of wisdom, courage and compassion, employed not only in the pursuit of personal happiness but also in societal and community concern.

The most recent IPCC report is bleak in its assessment of the moment in which we live. But we can choose to regard this moment as an opportunity to take action to aid all people; a moment for awakening. We have a choice. Although there is a tendency to see the ecological crisis as something which will happen in the future or as being too far advanced for us to act effectively, Buddhism encourages us to focus on the present moment and teaches that the potential for change lies in humanity transforming itself, what the Nichiren Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda refers to as Human Revolution. It empowers us to take action right now from the place where we are.

Buddhism and the crime of ecocide

Let us now consider, from a Buddhist perspective, the specifics of establishing ecocide as a crime. The parable of Aṅgulimāla tells of a bloodthirsty murderer of more than one thousand people who

sought to kill the Buddha. Running to catch up with Buddha, however, Angulimāla found himself unable to match his speed. Aṅgulimāla demanded that he stop, whereupon the Buddha explained that by renouncing the killing of all living things he had already stopped. However, Aṅgulimāla who was obsessed with killing would never be able to stop. So impressed was Aṅgulimāla with the Buddha, that he resolved to reform and took up the life of a monk seeking to live humbly. But when the people saw him they always ran away as they were afraid of him because of his past actions. Eventually, in the presence of the Buddha, the people asked the King of the realm to execute him for his crimes. The King refused and pointed out that as Aṅgulimāla had atoned and paid the price of his misdeeds, he should be allowed to live.²¹

“From a Buddhist perspective, supporting the reignition of this dialogue through the ecocide campaign is crucial if the collective wisdom of humanity and its desire to live in peace and security is to be realised.”

This parable indicates three points. First, the essential need to take responsibility for one’s misdeeds and that the censure of society can be part of that process. In the case of crimes against the environment, there is nothing in Buddhist philosophy to prevent holding someone to account for their crimes. Indeed the fundamental law of causality in Buddhism means that, despite many efforts to the contrary, no one can escape the effects of their actions

whether good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome. Buddhism, and in particular Nichiren Buddhism which draws on the Lotus Sutra for its inspiration, further regards those with the greatest power also to have the greatest responsibility – and recognises that, along with that greater power and responsibility, lies commensurate accountability for their actions.

Secondly, Buddhism is also clear that the potential for reform is never lost and that therefore perpetrators should face justice that is administered wisely, compassionately, and promptly. Buddhism places great emphasis on tolerance. However, the Nichiren Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda points out that all ‘true compassion fights against power that inflicts sorrow on ordinary people’. He argues that there are two aspects to Buddhist compassion – compassion that embodies empathy for ordinary people, and commitment to help them overcome suffering, and also the compassionate action required to remove the causes of suffering. The first, he concludes, is unconditional; the second stands up against injustice and that which oppresses people and causes misery.²²

Finally, Buddhism places a strong emphasis on arriving at resolutions to complex issues of justice through dialogue, as a means to further the causes of peace and security for all humanity. The Buddha’s teachings are found not only in preaching but in the interplay of questions and answers. The Lotus Sutra came about in response to questions from the Buddha’s disciples, and Nichiren used the same format of dialogue to challenge the ruling powers of the day. He called on them to base state governance on compassion and wisdom and to place ordinary people at the centre. In the parable of Aṅgulimāla, the King and the Buddha listen to the people and accept that they are justified in wishing that Aṅgulimāla is brought to justice, but also that the ultimate point of justice is the reformation of those held to account. In being fully remorseful of his deeds, and having experienced years of shunning from the population, Aṅgulimāla has paid his price. This

analogy shows that he has served his sentence, and thus reformed, is free. Ikeda points out that the original Geneva conventions were not only developed as a deterrent, but as a means of forestalling the conditions of great suffering and loss of life that would require their application.²³ In other words, their aim was to establish an international arena in which war would be rendered less likely by supplanting it with the rule of law arrived at through dialogue and negotiation.

Establishing a law of ecocide will not only provide criminal accountability to those who are responsible for acts of ecocide, but also create an arena for the sort of dialogue Buddhism advocates, enabling humanity to move forward in a way that gives the environment and biodiversity equal weight in its deliberations, recognising their interdependence and essential non-duality. From a Buddhist perspective, supporting the reignition of this dialogue through the ecocide campaign is crucial if the collective wisdom of humanity and its desire to live in peace and security is to be realised.

Now is the time for human beings themselves to change; to transform our perspectives, how we relate to one another, to nature and the world, and act based on our common purpose. More than just a law, the campaign to establish ecocide as a crime is also an opportunity to deepen, through dialogue, our collective understanding of the interdependence of all life; to address climate justice, conflict and war, inequality and poverty, and open 'a treasure house of possibilities, a dynamo for the creation of history'.²⁴ Faith communities are adding their voices to the many communities around the world who all wish deeply for Earth, our 'home', to be protected for now and future generations.

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE:

A re-enchantment of our vision of the natural world

Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad

What is now the world's principal headache, I think, is the question of climate change. This is going to be the kind of issue where the great religious traditions find themselves in substantial agreement. The climate crisis was not caused by religion in general or by any one religion, but was caused by an unbalanced and profane use, an instrumentalising of the material world by an essentially unsustainable materialism. So one would like to see the religions uniting as much as possible, putting up a common front in order to heal the world.

Signposts of the divine source

Coming at this with a specifically Muslim vocabulary, one would want to begin with the role of Adam, as part of a cosmic system that the Quran constantly reminds us is made up of autonomous self-regulating communities of different living species. Many verses in the Quran claim that, for instance 'there are no animals that walk upon the Earth, nor any bird that flies with its two wings, but that they are nations like ourselves'. Of course, commentators have always scratched their heads over such language: on what basis can they be like ourselves? But certainly, classical Islamic ethics and classical Islamic law do recognise what we would nowadays

call animal ethics and animal rights. And the idea of every order of creation as praising God in its own particular way is again standard in Quranic discourse.

So when we look at the world, we are not looking at God, but we are certainly looking at signposts pointing back to the divine source. The Quran says that ‘in the creation of the heavens and the Earth, the succession of night and day, are signs for people who understand’. This means that when we set aside ego, self-interest, jealousy, insecurity, and become our spiritual selves, away from the turbulence of the self, we log on to the meaning of things. And we see the world as authentic, that is to say a display of divine perfect qualities. So there is something profoundly indicative but also healing about nature, which leads us to realise that therefore nature deserves to be revered. This is why we have in our ethical code, inherited from the Prophet, strict rules about how one is to treat trees, for instance, how one deals with water, or with the animal world. The idea of animal rights was present in mediaeval Islamic law long before it was a twinkle in the eye of Western liberal ethicists. The idea of the world as being by God and of God and therefore, deserving of reverence, so that its abuse is a form of blasphemy, is a concept that is conventional and not novel in Muslim belief.

Ecocide and epistemicide

So, what is the role of the human community? In what sense are we custodians? In what sense could we actually frame laws in order to protect others from the damage which our particular species, our human community, has done? Well, the role of Adam, the type of paradigmatic human being, is enigmatic insofar as Adam ‘falls’. And yet we then have the great Quranic verse towards the beginning of the scripture where original sin comes to an end, Adam repents to God, God relents to Adam and there is no inherited defect of grace.

Nonetheless, we don't get to go back to that paradigmatic world where climate change would be unimaginable. We are here in this world of ebb and flow with these other communities, which are all, in their own way, praising the source of their being. And looking around us, we find signs that we are not just in danger of destroying our life support system in a kind of utilitarian way; instead humans are in danger of destroying those signs of beauty in natural environments, in virgin nature, which sustain our spiritual life. This is another area where we are going to agree; that we are not just talking about ecocide, but something that theologians sometimes call epistemicide. It is a spiritual as well as a physical massacre. And that is another reason why I think religion has a particularly precious role to play, and again, I'm sure that all of our traditions regard the natural world not just as present to keep us alive, but as something that has value in its own right, as a reality that is luminous with transcendence, and is our means of intuiting and engaging with transcendence.

“This is another area where we are going to agree, that we are not just talking about ecocide, but something that theologians sometimes call epistemicide.”

One of the noteworthy features of the life of the Prophet, the founder of Islam, is his engagement with nature. There are so many stories that, rather mysteriously in many ways, seem to have him communicating with animals. Animals would complain to him if their owners were maltreating them. He would be angry if birds were taken out of their nests to be used as pets. He for-

bade the use of animals as targets (for instance, blood sports are generally not allowed in classical Islamic ethics). And there are even more enigmatic statements about there being some kind of spiritual presence in physical non-animate things, like mountains; he could hear pebbles praising God in his hands. Here there is a certain element of recognition of a world that is not just out there as interesting scenery as we trot on to the real disclosure of the spiritual in the next world, but of a world which is nothing other than an array of God's signs. A world which is absolutely packed with luminescence that leads us back to the divine source, and therefore should be treated with reverence, rather than in a merely utilitarian way.

The responsibility towards all orders of creation

It has always been a very important aspect of Muslim understanding that we are a species that has a moral life, an intellectual life and a mystical life, an order of nature that in a sense can be more discursive because it thinks of outcomes in the future in a way that animals cannot. But nonetheless, we are part of the larger biotic community, one element of the totality of the interweaving of the natural world which God in his amazing plenitude has set in his Creation. As a result, we have very serious responsibilities, not just for the well-being of other human beings, but to our fellow creatures, as traditional Islam put it: in all orders of creation. I imagine that this religious case against materialism is something that spans religious divisions, that all of the religions insist that we don't live by bread alone, that the current consumer-addicted society is not only bad for our spiritual life, but is clearly bad for all other dimensions of creation as well. I am convinced that we stand shoulder to shoulder with other believers in saying that too much materialism makes us sick and makes the planet sick.

We need to be looking upwards and inwards rather than just at what's on the supermarket shelves. I think that there is an ascetic

message in monotheism in particular, which needs to enrich the climate change activism discourse. But there is also something more than this, and again, I think other religionists would agree that so much activism has focused on the fact that we should worry about the degradation of the natural environment, because it is now threatening our own survival and our own comfort. This approach is very short-sighted and probably not strong enough to bring about the huge revolution that is going to be globally required, if we are to adopt more sustainable habits as a species. Instead we should be looking at the natural world not as resources to be conserved and husbanded, but as having rights of its own, its own integrity, independent of human needs. That the other species, the other nations of which the Quran speaks—the world seen from the perspective of the lions, the world seen from the perspective of the rabbits, of the birds, whatever different optics with which we can see life on Earth—that they have their own integrity. And of course, from our perspective, we see them as having integrity because in their own way, they are praising God and bearing witness to the majesty and perfection of the One who created them. A re-enchantment of our vision of the natural world is something that Islam and religions generally can significantly contribute to the conventional rather materialistic discourse on climate change and conservation. So Adam, fallen and then un-fallen because original sin came to an end, has some kind of duty of care and custodianship, but without that custodianship becoming potentially abusive.

Classical Islamic law: how would this relate to a crime of ecocide? Well, Islamic law is not statutory law, it is not a single list of dos and don'ts. It is an enormously diverse tradition; much is left to the wisdom of local judges and customs. But certainly, to violate the order of creation and the balance of the world is a crime against the Almighty as well as a crime against his creatures. I think that there will be very strong grounds in Islamic legal and

ethical circles for supporting this vitally important initiative, so that the crime of ecocide – which is also a crime of epistemicide, a crime against our spiritual as well as our physical natures – should be added to the list of international statutes and crimes, for which the world is collectively committed to exacting punitive powers. There is something very noble and very sacred about seeing culprits brought to book. Law has since ancient times possessed a sacred dimension. And I think that we will find our different journeys towards God enhanced when we campaign for justice in this way, when we are facing this great crisis of our age.

“Instead we should be looking at the natural world not as resources to be conserved and husbanded, but as having rights of its own, its own integrity, independent of human needs.”

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE:

Transforming the world into the dream of God

K G Hammar

How we think about things guides our choices and actions. Theology is about how we think of ourselves, of the world, nature, and the whole—GOD. When we face the current ecological crises and challenges we must start with the theological perspective(s). Let us begin our exploration by letting Apostle Paul guide us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God...” (Romans ch 12:2). Paul is writing to the small congregation of Christians, Christ-followers, in Rome, the capital of the empire. When he warns of the risk of being conformed to this world, it is the risk of being conformed to the thinking of this world, to imperial thinking. It is not about being at home in this world, it is about not being at home with the thinking of this world, dominated for millennia by imperial thinking. In the empire you rule from top to bottom, by force, by threats and coercion, by enforcing “the Roman peace” on us, not Shalom. This means that Paul here advocates an anti-empire thinking. He warns his fellow Christians in Rome to be on guard: not to be influenced by imperial thinking when it comes to God, humans, all living things, nature, creation, cosmos. As a historical note, already here it can be observed that this is exactly what happened when the Emperor Constantine and his successors embraced the Christian movement in the 4th Century. The embrace

included a separation of interests: this world became the sole interest of the emperor, and the church concentrated on the other world, what was expected to come after death: “heaven”. But this is far from the thinking and writing of the Apostle Paul!

The quote ends with the ability to discern what is “the will of God”. The will of God is not primarily that we humans should end up in heaven after our physical death, as unaffected as possible by this world. The will of God is the transformation of this world into what Archbishop Desmond Tutu often called the dream of God. And this work of transforming the world into the dream of God can only start from within, from the renewing of our minds.

So, the calling to transform the world into a liveable place for all that has life, God-given life, inevitably starts with the renewal of our thinking, from within. An inward transformation is the condition for the outward transformation. This is how theology can help to inspire concrete work by churches in caring for creation.

To continue to dig deeper: transformation (in the Greek New Testament) is metamorphosis, which means change of form, ‘morphae’. It is a radical change, both inward and outward. To illustrate what this radical change might mean, let us be informed by another famous biblical quotation where ‘morphae’ is mentioned. In Philippians ch 2 we read about Christ Jesus who was in the form of God, but did not want to exploit that and instead emptied himself and took the form of a servant, or even slave. To change form, metamorphosise, this is what Christ means to us, as an example, as a possibility and a challenge. As followers of Christ we are expected to be transformed, to metamorphosise, for the sake of the world. God so loved the world that he sent his Son, his metamorphosis/possibility/challenge. The way we think might transform the way we see the world, see ourselves, see God. After the Christ-metamorphosis we cannot any longer see God as the almighty super-emperor who rules the world with might.

We can no longer see the creation, nature, all living things beside us as our property, to our disposal, to meet our greed. In the face of all who share this planet with us humans we need to empty ourselves, as Christ Jesus did. 'Kenosis' is the Greek word for that. Empty our minds from all that is conformed to this world, to empire thinking, and instead enable those we meet to present themselves to us as they are; created together with us, loved by God as we are loved, and thus make possible a new community that includes all that exist on their own conditions. All theology must be metamorphosis theology. All theology must be kenosis theology. All theology must be eco-theology!

“A new life of humility gives room to more voices than my own, to release the song of praise that is hidden in all that exist, makes me a part of the choir of creation in the song of praise of all creation - from whales to hummingbirds, from grass to oak trees, from bees to eagles, from children, women and men!”

When we empty ourselves of the ego, the self-occupation that has caused the planetary crises we are now living in, we are transformed. From the lonely planet, where I am alone, to the living planet where we all share the gift of life, the possibility to live in

community, to discover anew the wonderful place we are living in. A new life of humility gives room to more voices than my own, to release the song of praise that is hidden in all that exist, makes me a part of the choir of creation in the song of praise of all creation—from whales to hummingbirds, from grass to oak trees, from bees to eagles, from children, women and men! The experience of being part of the Whole helps me also to discover the presence of God, the Spirit in my life, in the deep inside of my being, what we call the mystical experience. Where the subject of my life no longer is I, the ego, but God the Spirit.

When I move from ego to God, when I try to “live God” are there visible signs of the inner transformation, the metamorphosis? Maybe these:

Love—to see the world with the eyes of God

Compassion—to hear the cry of all that are exploited and oppressed

Solidarity—to speak out for all that have no voice

Nonviolence—force can never change the world

Justice/Righteousness—equal rights on the one and only planet

Sharing—the gifts of creation are for all, not for a few.

To be more specific: the human self-image must change! As the Bible mentions us humans as created in the image of God, the understanding of what that means is dependent upon our understanding of God. If we see God as the Almighty self-sufficient ruler of the world—which is empire theology—then to be created in the image of God means that we humans are also almighty in our relations to the rest of creation. We are self-sufficient and refuse to see our dependence on all the other created beings and things that exist together with us on this planet. We are still the mightiest species on Earth, but if the image of God is transformed by the kenosis of Christ then the might is love, not coercion and

violence. We see the interplay between the understanding of God and the understanding of humans, of ourselves. That is why theology is important! If we realize that the present understanding of humans on this planet, as rulers, as exploiters, as greedy colonisers of all living habitats, then we need to scrutinise our view of God. When many of our fellow-citizens in our Western countries are stuck in the old empire theology image of God, which they rightly have disqualified from being a part of their understanding of life and reality, then the dialogue is difficult and complicated but nevertheless necessary. But every transformation starts from within: have we really abandoned our emperor view of God? Is Christ really influencing our view of God with his kenosis? Or have we transformed the role of Christ to be the necessary sacrifice for our human salvation in splendid isolation from the rest of creation? If we realize that the human self-image must change, we have a transforming theological work to do!

All theology must be metamorphosis theology! All theology must be kenosis theology! All theology must be eco-theology!

The way we view nature, creation, must change. If the planetary systems and all living things on this planet cannot survive, the way we have viewed them until now must change. We must let God transform our eyes so that we see what God sees when she looks upon her creation (or he and his if you are aware that all our language for God is just indicating, hinting, and beyond what language can master – what we call apophatic). To see the creation with the loving eyes of God, not with eyes of greed or dominion. Ecology and all other sciences have taught us that we humans are not above everything else. We are part of everything and heavily dependent on all the other parts of the web of life where we dwell. Eyes of love can be informed by the wisdom of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber who taught us to see a “thou”, a you, in all that exist together with us. If you see the other, person or animal, or plant or stone as a you, which is what love is about, then you

empty yourself—kenosis!—of all demands, expectations and hopes from the other and allow him or her or it to be itself, to be what God created him or her or it to be. The empty space between “I” and “thou” is the possibility for God the Spirit to dwell in you as a relational being and fill you with the love of God which is unconditional, unmerited—a gift of grace.

To be a follower of Christ includes being humble, being driven by humility in the relationships within which we are all living. It is very interesting to discover that climate science often talks about humility as the unconditional quality humans need to strive for. That means real humility, engendered by the realisation that we are all part of the same web of life on this planet and we are all dependent upon one another, not the kind of humility which is a self-promoting image of politicians and business people when they are in trouble. Humility is accompanied by empathy, the ability or gift of being able to see the other from inside him or her or it. It means to share the hopes and fears of the other. This includes the fear of what humans can get up to, how we humans can continue to exploit and colonise with no regard for the necessary living conditions for species other than ourselves.

Humility, empathy and justice! We have human rights, property rights and many other rights solely for humans. We need eco-justice and international law on ecocide, crimes against nature, ecosystems and common goods. This means that we need a new economic system that does not exploit, but serves the wellbeing of all that exists.

Humility, empathy, justice—and simplicity! If we recall the old Christian virtue of simplicity, we confront the prevailing global economic system head on! We are all, at least most of us, stuck in the prison of consumption and consumerism. We know that this system is built upon the willingness of us all to consume not only what we need for a living, but also what we don't need or even want. We are supporting this economic system by being obsessed

with consumption and spending all our free time in the magnificent temples of consumption that we find all over the world. This is how we enable the increasing speed of the economic wheel that not only makes the rich richer and the poor poorer but also destroys the conditions for life on this planet. This time could instead offer opportunities of emptiness—kenosis!—for the renewal of mind that is the precondition for transformation of the world.

“The issue here is how we as Christians and churches can contribute to this transformation by our faith, theology and experience.”

We are now close to the tipping points of many life-sustaining ecosystems. We need simplicity, we need a new economic global world order that gives room for simplicity, welcomes simplicity and serves the needs of all that exist. The prison of consumerism is built upon three cornerstones—ego, property or possession and violence. The ego wants to possess and when possessions are threatened violence comes to the rescue. And when our eyes are formed by owning property they tend to look at all others and all other things as objects to control and utilise and to see value in them in their usefulness for us. Exactly those eyes that have created our planetary crises!

For this transformation we need cooperation; to save the planet is not an isolated Christian business, it is a challenge for all humankind and it can be solved only in cooperation. The issue here is how we as Christians and churches can contribute to this transformation through our faith, theology and experience. When we

focus on creation, openness to others comes very naturally as almost all that is said about creation in the Holy Scripture is found in the Hebrew Bible, what we usually call the Old Testament, that we share with our Jewish friends. To isolate us from other faith traditions is therefore impossible, they all have their contribution to make to this mountainous task or mission ahead of us. But for us Christians it should not be any problem, as we have the ability to see God in all: in all persons, in all living beings, in all things, in all that happens every moment—God as pan-en-teistic, present in all. To cooperate means to cooperate with God in all situations and relations, with God in God's other created beings, in the harmony of the symphony of life! As if all is possible!

Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven!
Let your reign call us, inspire us and strengthen us! The tipping point is near!

CHRISTIAN-PACIFIC PERSPECTIVE:

Reweaving our Ecological Mat

James Bhagwan

Introduction

For Pacific Islanders, who like many indigenous people around the world have a deep ecological relationship and worldview, the issue of ecocide resonates with our people's profound sense of loss from green-washed and blue-washed extractive industries imposed on our communities. An international law on ecocide would provide the necessary legal provisions from both an environmental and human rights framework for the social, cultural and development reframing that is essential for the planet.

Pacific Snapshot

In most maps of the world the Pacific Ocean is often relegated to the edges, split into two with little regard for the fact that it is a region of island communities—connected, not separated, by the ocean traversed by giant canoes long before so-called European “discovery.” Within the region, the Pacific is referred to as the “Blue” or “Liquid” continent. Maps also infer the large blue space as “empty”; either because many consider our islands small and underdeveloped or because they have an anthropocentric perspective which doesn't consider non-human life significant beyond exploitation. Yet, while it is these perspectives that describe the conditions under which ecocide takes place, they are a contradiction to the Pacific understanding of life, community and the

deeply woven relationship we have with land, sea and sky.

If one zooms in to the Pacific for a closer look at the largest and deepest of the world's four oceans, covering more than a third of the Earth's surface and containing more than half of its free water, one finds that:

- the Pacific Ocean produces most of the planet's oxygen and regulates global weather and climate;
- most coral reef species in the world are found in the Pacific Ocean;
- 70 percent of the global fish catch comes from the Pacific Ocean;
- an incredible biodiversity are found on the islands of the Pacific: 5,330 native plant species, 242 native bird species, 61 native terrestrial reptiles, 15 native mammals, 3 endemic native amphibians and some 4,000 snail species;
- In the human communities that call the Pacific their home, approximately 1,200 separate languages can be found—two fifths of the total indigenous languages spoken in the world.

The above is just a snapshot of the diversity found in the Pacific.

A Pacific understanding of environmental degradation as ecocide

Our ancients, who read the stars and travelled across our mighty ocean in their giant canoes millennia before European discovery and conquest, considered themselves part of the ecosystem, not above it. Our indigenous spirituality and knowledge are based on this wisdom. Pacific communities continue to reaffirm that that “the earth is our common home and is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”.²⁵ We also affirm that “we must individually and collectively respond to the challenge to work together for the common

good – the greater good – to ensure that the land and sea is not raped; to ensure that the vulnerable among us retain their dignity; and to speak with one voice to the suffering that our environment and our communities are experiencing.”⁶

“Our ancients, who read the stars and travelled across our mighty ocean in their giant canoes millennia before European discovery and conquest, considered themselves part of the ecosystem, not above it. Our indigenous spirituality and knowledge are based on this wisdom.”

Our Pacific understanding of the Christian faith affirms living in this ecological household by recognising the sacred cords of ecology (Oikos-logos), economics (Oikos-nomos), and ecumenicity (Oikumene), which we believe is the key to protecting life in our common household (the Oikos) of the whole planet. These cords are woven together to ensure a community that exists in relationship with the natural environment. Each generation, as those before and those who come after are called by indigenous knowledge, spirituality and faith to embody a profound respect for creation as an interconnected web of life, living as a caring and resilient community, and valuing wellbeing above profit. Our concepts for land and sea consider human beings as belonging to,

rather than owning. Despite our diversity in the region, we have a common understanding around food security, freshwater, genetic commons, communal lands, the atmosphere, the oceans and outer space – all of which are part of our identity, our ecological relationship and our traditional knowledge. This understanding is the basis of our traditional economies.

In the “Pacific Normal” life is significant, valued and celebrated. There is a celebration of life over material wealth. Spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect are the core strands of our Pacific Mat which prioritises relationships, celebrates quality of life and values human beings and creation over the production of things. The Pacific concepts of *whenua*, *fenua*, *enua*, *vanua* all mean that the land is the people’s identity, life and soul. Land is people, resources, cultures, beliefs, spirituality, languages, social systems, and the sea. The practical outcome of this understanding is communitarian sharing and distribution of resources with the absence of the selfish pursuit of wealth.

While Western economies revolve around profit and economic growth, the traditional economies of the Pacific are concerned with people and the total quality of their lives; caring and concern for others within the extended families and compassion for all people, especially for the sick and elderly are values of the communities; respect, hospitality, generosity, and forgiveness are other marks of the traditional communities. Nobody is excluded.²⁷

At the core of the ecological crisis is a loss of vision and understanding of the delicate interdependence of life; that once guided and ensured the survival of Pacific Island generations for centuries. The Western model of development, based on an ideology of domination and extraction has severed the sacred thread that connected economics, ecology, and morality with devastating consequences. This type of development denies that an ecosystem is a system whose elements interact with their surroundings, the

ecological, social, intellectual, and spiritual context as a unit – the whole household.

Resolving the climate crisis is dependent on the ethics and values systems that govern our relationships with the environment and each other. We call the world to a new way, a new normal that honours the practice of our ancestors of living in harmony with and not exploiting nature, our sister and brother creation. In *Laudato Si*, His Holiness Pope Francis called for an ecological conversion that brings us into further solidarity with our human and non-human family. In our Household of God in the Pacific, this has been described as *Reweaving The Ecological Mat* (REM)²⁸ to renew and strengthen the sacred cords of ecology, economics and ecumenicity which we believe is the key to protecting life in our common household.

In the Pacific context, this interconnectivity of relationships is often described using the metaphors of “mat” and “basket” – as a place for everyone, for all life and the integral reciprocal and symbiotic relationships among people as community and between people and environment.

Reweaving The Ecological Mat is a gift from the Pacific; an ecological framework for development. A system of change based on the following worldviews as interpretative keys:

- i. Indigenous knowledge (philosophy, spirituality and art)
- ii. Biblical and theological knowledge
- iii. Local knowledge
- iv. Christian spirituality texts

This reorientation of worldviews has been recognised as vital for frameworks “that place the environment before people, to coalesce in harmony, in and of service to one another.”²⁹ In New Zealand, for example, “te ao Māori,” an indigenous Māori perspective, is applied by national and local government to environmental,

social, economic issues and even climate change, in order to ascertain the impact this has on community wellbeing. The te ao Māori perspective offers the principles of *whakapapa* (descent and kinship), *manaakitanga* (duties and expectations of care and reciprocity), *rangatiratanga* (governance and leadership), *kotahitanga* (collective unity), and *wairuatanga* (spiritual embodiment).³⁰

“At the core of the ecological crisis is a loss of vision and understanding of the delicate interdependence of life; that once guided and ensured the survival of Pacific Island generations for centuries.”

REM, as a process of decolonising development, calls for the “unweaving of toxic strands” and “reweaving” of strands discarded or damaged by colonialism and neocolonial liberalism. There are five strands on which this framework focuses:

- i. Politics, its systems, arrangements, distribution of power etc.
- ii. Developments – its ethics and models in the region
- iii. Social and physical health and wellbeing
- iv. Spirituality and theology
- v. Environmental health and wellbeing

REM places ecological wellbeing at the centre of development, where the collective whole matters. From the Pacific perspective it is not an alternative paradigm, as it is the “way of our ancestor”.

In the context of ecocide, this is the process of articulating our own development ideals and indicators and these may be different from what the ‘western’ world considers to be the ideals and indicators of development. This could also be the alternative to unbridled capitalism that the world is seeking in the midst of the climate crisis.

The Reweaving the Ecological Mat initiative concerns itself with the oikonomical aspects of development—economical, ecological and ecumenical—as integral and interconnected aspects of the Households of Pacific Peoples:

- Environment—land, sea, air—is the most immediate and tangible form and symbol of the grace or *mana* of God for Pacific peoples.³¹
- We who inhabit the most remote islands, mountains, deserts and forests should be the first to set the value of our ecological data, because the economy of the 21st century will depend on us meeting our ecological and development goals.³²
- Our existence and our survival can never be separated from our land and sea. Our life in God is in creation. God is our bread of life and our water of life in our land and sea. Our tropical forest is the home and garden of many species as well as our human communities. Our land and sea are us and we are them. Do not separate us. If you do so, you are murdering us.³³
- Just as life and wellbeing for the majority of people in industrialised countries are inconceivable without the mechanisms, assumptions and achievements of the global neoliberal economy, so life and wellbeing for the majority of people in the Pacific is difficult to imagine apart from their close interconnectedness to the land, sea and sky.³⁴

- Spiritual grounding is of fundamental importance to Pacific wellbeing, and this is not reflected in global capitalist systems. It has been relegated to lower-level knowledge in modern and foreign development narratives.

Key dynamic movements of Reweaving:

The REM process proposes the following five dynamic movements which aim to provide a paradigm shift on the development narrative:

I. HAPPENING IN REAL TIME:

A “now” starting point. This first movement draws on what is quite a normal activity that people do nearly every day: they talk about what is happening all around them! On one level this involves frank and honest narrating and hearing stories of people’s and communities’ views, eye- and ear-witness accounts and experiences in the present time, in terms of economic development activities and what they see as the multifaceted impacts of such developments—on people and their relationships to each other and to their surroundings, on economic and financial differences between players and spectators, and especially on the environment. On another level, this involves and calls for deeper conversation, engagement and analysis.

2. “THERE WAS A TIME WHEN...”

A historical reference point. “There was a time when ...” This second movement draws on traditions of storytelling, especially of establishing a reference point in the relatively recent historical past. This is a demarcating point of reference, when a negative twist changed the plot of the story from good to not good. Ecological Accounting methodology points out that there is a need to establish this “there was a time” when demarcating point of reference.

3. A PREHISTORIC ORIGINATING POINT ...

“FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL OR A LONG TIME AGO ...”

This third movement draws on traditions of storytelling about the prehistoric (mythic) past, or the originating point in time. It narrates tales of origins of creation, the involvement of gods and spirits, and the place of humans. It narrates tales of the land, sea and sky and human interaction within this web of life. It narrates the dynamic and near-harmonious interaction people and human communities once had with their environments and brings them back to life and into contemporary consciousness, through storytelling. It reweaves storied layers and threads, and opens up the repositories of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. “This is not about looking backwards. Rather, it is about creatively using our people’s experiences and values to build a better future.”

4. A KAIROS IRRUPTION TIME...

“FROM A TIME OF NOVEL GOSPEL ...”

This fourth movement draws on the traditions of storytelling focused on God and God’s relationality with the whole of creation, and on the good news of God’s reign declared and demonstrated through Jesus of Nazareth. It provides the space for theological and biblical reflections on people’s narratives and life experiences. This revisiting and rethinking appropriate biblical narratives, exploring creation theologies, eco-theologies and theologies of development forms an integral part of this fourth movement. All of this is for the dual purpose of, first, grounding the storytelling in the previous movements, especially in the Fourth Movement, and, second, critiquing the kinds of development activities that currently take place (as outlined in the First Movement).

5. A HISTORY OF POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES ...

“FROM THIS POINT IN TIME ONWARD ...”

This fifth and final movement draws on storytelling as dreaming,

even envisioning, possible alternative futures that emerge from all the storytelling in the previous four Movements. It is described as a “history of possible alternative futures” because the Pacific Islands are strategically placed to lead in the change that we need and want to see. As Pacific Islanders, we have a tremendous potential for leading in terms of how we account for our ecological assets. By mapping out and forging possible alternative futures, we are in fact writing the preferred history of our futures.

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Ecocide as a regional security issue

The 2050 *Strategy for the Blue Pacific*, which was recently endorsed and launched by the political leaders of the Pacific during the 51st Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Suva, Fiji, notes the traditional and non-traditional security implications of climate change and other environmental damage. The strategy recognises the deep connection between the Pacifics people and land, sea and sky. Yet at the same time there is a sense among faith-based and civil society organisations that there is much to do to address a perceived hypocrisy of what our communities are calling for an

increased focus on extractive industries on land and under the sea. In this sense an ecocide law will help our communities hold our governments and proponents of extractive industries using Green Economy and Blue Economy frameworks to account. The ecological conversion called for by Pope Frances and our Pacific communities will be critically enhanced by such an international law.

JEWISH PERSPECTIVE:

Caring for creation is key to receiving the blessings of the Creator

Rabbi Yonatan Neril

Rabbi Amorai asked: ‘Where is the Garden of Eden?’ He replied: ‘It is on earth.’³⁵ Today humanity lives at a time of the coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and mass damage to ecosystems, which can be called ecocide. We witness the tragic loss of so many lives and profound disruption of families, communities, and cultures. These interconnected crises signal to humanity the need to restore balance between people and nature. Religious wisdom can provide important messages for striving to find this balance. In speaking of ecocide, many people fear that humans have irrevocably destroyed the ecology of “Eden” on earth. Some people believe religion is separate and distinct from ecology or care for God’s creation. Most Bible study, teaching, and preaching occur without addressing the ecological crisis, the greatest crisis facing humanity.

The need for a faith-based ecological approach

The former dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Dr. Gus Speth, says “I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science, we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top en-

vironmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."³⁶ Scientific research has powerfully revealed the widespread degradation of nature, yet scientists' ability to motivate society toward ecological change is limited. Religious belief and understanding have the potential to move many more people worldwide to environmental action than science has done. The Anthropocene, or human-caused mass extinction event on Earth, occurs at a time when 84% of people on the planet affiliate with a religion.³⁷ More than 76 percent of Americans are religiously affiliated.³⁸ Nonetheless, religions have so far failed to substantially integrate scientific and ecological findings into their preaching, teaching, and living.

“Rabbi Amorai asked: ‘Where is the Garden of Eden?’ He replied: ‘It is on earth.’”

In the US, a survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and the American Academy of Religion found that “most Americans who attend religious services at least once or twice a month hear little from their clergy leaders about the issue of climate change.”³⁹ Could the low incidence of American clergy addressing climate change be playing a role in the US having the world's highest historical carbon emissions? While governments individually and collectively seek to address global environmental challenges, current approaches have yet to catalyse a collective global response that will truly meet these challenges. Part of the reason is failure to engage those people with possibly the greatest potential to inspire behavior change – faith leaders, clergy, and religious teachers.

Religion has been a channel for moral and ethical instruction across the ages and across the world. Faith can and should help us to address the roots of our planet's ecological crisis. Rabbi Dov Berkowitz says in regards to the Torah, "How do we utilise 3,500 years of spiritual consciousness for the betterment of our contemporary society?"⁴⁰ When we are faced with the compelling, sustained insights of religious thought and tradition, we can come to see our current life choices in a different and more ecological light.

Addressing the spiritual roots of the ecological crisis

What on earth are we doing to creation? We have disrupted the ecological balance of all God created on earth, and we owe it to God, to each other, and to all species to restore the balance. This is the greatest physical and spiritual challenge humanity has ever faced together. Caring for creation is key to receiving the full blessings of the Creator. Awareness of the Infinite opens us up to protecting the immediate—the very planet on which we live.

As a fundamental part of many people's lives, religion can be a key motivator by shaping values. Religion appeals not just to our intellect but to our soul—and this is where change is most needed. When God is at the centre of our environmental awareness, it becomes much more powerful. At this moment in history, we need a major infusion of energy specifically to help faith groups inspire behavioural change for sustainable living.

How does the Bible relate deeply to living in balance with God's creation, through a lifestyle that is not only aware of but protects the natural world? Is concern for environmental stewardship external to the Torah, or a central message embedded within it? In 2020, I co-authored *Eco Bible Volume I: An Ecological Commentary on Genesis and Exodus*. In 2021 I co-authored *Eco Bible Volume II, on Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*. *Eco Bible's* commentaries on the Torah reveal a spiritually grounded vision

for both long-term sustainability and immediate environmental mindfulness and action.

God created the world out of love for life on earth. This new, unique *Eco Bible* explores the deep inspiration we can find in the Bible for fulfilling the blessing of all life, for changing course to preserve God's creation, and for sustaining human life in harmony with nature and all of God's creatures. Some of the Bible's verses—which first “spoke” to people in ancient times when the Bible was given—may seem cryptic, obscure, or irrelevant to our modern times or lives. The chief function of contemporary commentaries like *Eco Bible*, as with all rabbinic commentaries that have strived to enlighten, is to make the holy book relevant in our own generation and those to come.

“Applying the teachings of the Torah to stewardship of God’s creation is not just an idea for today, but essential for a future in which we achieve a balanced, worldwide ecosystem and thrive on a planet viable for all life.”

Applying the teachings of the Torah to stewardship of God's creation is not just an idea for today, but essential for a future in which we achieve a balanced, worldwide ecosystem and thrive on a planet viable for all life. Accelerating the awakening of religious and spiritual process is needed for humanity to keep moving fast enough to avert irreversible environmental deterioration of our

only home. The environmental movement has failed to effect transformational change in the past 50 years partly because fear of the darkness of ecological collapse has driven the movement. The light of spirituality can spark a more hopeful approach with deeper and broader effect. Here are three reasons why.

FIRST, RELIGION CAN PERSUADE PEOPLE TO CONSUME IN MODERATION AS THEY FIND TRUE SATISFACTION IN SPIRITUALITY, COMMUNITY, AND FAMILY. Spiritual living should bring consciousness to our consumption. To rise to this ultimate challenge for human civilisation, we have to raise our spiritual awareness and maturity. A person can exist at varying levels of soul awareness, but a sustainable planet will require that we learn to live and thrive at higher levels of spiritual consciousness.

SECOND, RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS HELP INSTILL FORESIGHT AND LONG-TERM THINKING. The rabbis of the Talmud taught about 1,500 years ago: “Who is the wise person? The person who can see the effect of their actions.”⁴¹ We must put both the present and future of our children and grandchildren first, above expanding our own standard of living. Spiritual awareness can help us recognise the link between our actions and the larger problem, while cultivating foresight, concern, and change.

FINALLY, AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, RELIGION EMBODIES HOPE. Some people—out of terror, anger, or depression—despair of our ever returning to personal and planetary balance and sustainability. Yet as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, “Hope is a human virtue, but one with religious underpinnings.”⁴²

Billions of people equally respect the scientific view of the universe and the spiritual view. *Eco Bible* draws on the wisdom of many generations of Jewish sages, contemporary rabbis, and

scientific sources to connect religion and science. E.O. Wilson, famed biological scientist and educator, writes in his book *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, “Religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today.... 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.”⁴³

The Earth is our collective ship

According to an 1,800-year-old Jewish commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai describes a group of people travelling in a boat. One of them takes a drill and begins to bore a hole. The others ask, “Why are you doing this?” The person replies, “Why are you concerned? Am I not drilling under my own place?” The rest reply, “But you will flood the boat for all of us!”⁴⁴ Imagine being a passenger on this boat. One person, without concern for others, jeopardises your safety and security. The person drilling may have compelling reasons. Perhaps he or she is hungry and wants to drop a fishing line, or is hot and wants to cool his or her feet in the water. Maybe the boat is in fresh water, and he or she is thirsty. But no matter how compelling the reason, drilling a hole in a boat to fulfil one person’s desires threatens everyone.

Rabbi Shimon’s story warns us of the destructive power of letting our selfish desires overtake all other considerations. Today’s environmental challenges are *not* about “whatever floats your boat.” Everyone on the boat (or planet) needs to work together to ensure such behaviour doesn’t continue. The person drilling is dangerous, but the rest of us ignoring the threat they pose is equally dangerous. If the boat sinks, the fault is both the driller’s and those who stood idly by.

We have one home. With close to 8 billion people and around 8 million species, the earth is our collective ship. Jumping ship is out of the question. Some of the most profound ecological lessons

come from people on a ship, from Noah to today's polar researchers, on a ship trapped in Arctic ice to study climate change. Something about being surrounded by water heightens our awareness of vulnerability, and of personal and collective safety. People on a ship can feel more compelled to act when someone behaves recklessly, because they see how directly another's damage can endanger their and others' lives. The ship metaphor sharply conveys the paradigm of responsibility, stewardship, and respect that we need for sharing and steering our planet.

In our times, the indirectness and "invisibility" of the planetary damage we cause poses a major challenge. Even when we are very aware of our role in the problem, we don't see the effect of our actions on a daily basis. The earth is so big and complex. Turning on a car engine, a light switch, or an air-conditioner doesn't suddenly raise the outside temperature or trigger an extreme storm. But we are essentially drilling holes without fully grasping the consequences of our action. If we did fully grasp them, could we look our children in the eye and admit to them that our lifestyle will jeopardise their future? Perhaps we are ecologically passive because our current lifestyle gives us so much pleasure and comfort. We are bombarded, tantalised, and too often influenced toward increased consumption by advertising mottoes like "Makes me happy" and "I'm lovin' it!" The Baal Shem Tov teaches that when the soul lacks spiritual pleasure, it compensates by pursuing the pleasures of this world and its excesses.⁴⁵ What do we truly care about most? We must face the collective reality that we cannot simultaneously expand our consumer behaviours and live sustainably.

Our actions are the true indication of our commitments. In 1992, the world's governments committed to curbing climate change and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, yet every year since, humanity's emissions have risen. Emissions of CO₂ in 2020 have doubled since 1990. Clearly, we are not sufficiently commit-

ted to the announced goal. Since 1992, billions of people have continued to source their food unsustainably from across the planet, collectively taken millions of plane flights and driven billions of miles, and eaten a tremendous amount of food cultivated through unsustainable and even dangerous processes. These trends show no sign of reversing. What can shift our direction, to caring and working more diligently towards what is most important—a thriving, spiritually aware, and sustainable humanity—and to live in ways that can actually achieve this?

Noah's ark and the Titanic⁴⁶

According to Jewish oral tradition, God gave humans 120 years before unleashing the Flood. God chose Noah as a messenger to build the ark as a sign to the people that the flood would come unless they changed their actions.⁴⁷ Noah said to the people, “Return from your evil ways and deeds.”⁴⁸ They did not. What led God ultimately to carry out the most serious environmental catastrophe in human history and, through flood, wipe away virtually all living creatures? The judgement was sealed because of the sin of lawlessness, robbery, or wrongdoing (*chamas*). The Rabbis of the Talmud teach that “a person would put out a market stall full of beans, and each person would come and take less than a penny’s worth so that they could not be prosecuted by the law.”⁴⁹ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch teaches that “*chamas* is a wrong that is too petty to be caught by human justice, but if committed continuously can gradually ruin your fellow person.”⁵⁰ God said, “You are not playing by the book, so I too will not play by the book.”⁵¹ God responded by bringing a single drop of rain and then another. Just as the people took one bean and then another, without looking at the consequences of their combined actions, God punished them drop by drop, culminating in the Flood.

We can see parallels in our modern times. In 1896, Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius was recognized for his theory of climate

change.⁵² Nearly a century later, the UN created the 1988 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change “to provide the governments of the world with a clear scientific view of what is happening to the world’s climate.”⁵³ The world has largely ignored the panel’s warnings. Even concerned nations struggle to significantly change the actions of their governments and populations. It has been 120 years since Arrhenius’s climate change theory, and massive floods now repeatedly threaten even the most developed countries. After Hurricane Harvey in 2017, *The New York Times* quoted Maya Wadler, a teenager in Houston, Texas, as she recalled the moments her family’s home flooded. “I usually just trust my parents that everything is going to be okay. But I looked up, and I saw that my dad was closing his eyes, the water was getting in his eyes. And I just thought: He has absolutely no idea where we are going to go.”⁵⁴ In 2019, Houston flooded for the third time in three years.

Many such devastating events have arrived sooner and more intensely than predicted.⁵⁵ We are ill-prepared. With 8 billion people sharing our planet, the greatest risk again comes from seemingly inconsequential actions of individuals, combining in their impact. This age is even called the Anthropocene, including the human-caused sixth great extinction event on earth.⁵⁶ For the first time, humans can now destroy or radically alter virtually *all* life—a power so great it could once only be ascribed to God. Our current reality has striking similarities to the Titanic, whose captain received many warnings of icebergs from other ships but chose to ignore them. He believed that his ship—the largest ever built—was stronger than nature; unsinkable. By the time the crew spotted the fatal iceberg, it was too late to turn the ship away from its cataclysmic collision course. Today, we are on an ecological collision course of our own making and are bearing full steam ahead. But there is still time to act like Noah instead of the Titanic’s captain. Our ship carries all of humanity and 8 million species. We can change course and prevent ecocide. By uniting and

striving to live in balance with creation, and with God's help, we can steer toward a future that ensures the survival and thriving of everyone and everything on board.

INDIGENOUS VODUN PERSPECTIVE:

The Sacred Pool “Zekpon Adonɔ”

Appolinaire Oussou Lio

In Benin and pre-colonial Africa, the cultural and religious practices we call ‘endogenous’, or Vodun, are closely linked to the natural world and to sacred sites—sites that are poorly protected and now under threat. More than a belief system, these practices are a complete way of life that includes culture, philosophy, language, art, dance, music and medicine. When we close ourselves off from nature, we close ourselves off from God and life.

Endogenous practices or Vodun

Endogenous practices⁵⁷ are based on three fundamental pillars

- the community philosophy;
- love;
- the relationship with the Divine Principles.

In the name of the community philosophy, all activities in our ancient society are carried out in union, solidarity, mutual aid and in completely honest and sincere actions. In this ancient society, love is expressed through five fundamental values: truth, equity, justice, tolerance and patience. Each of these values embody both the personal and the collective and, above all, the behaviour expected from each person. These values are those taught in our traditional schools – our monasteries and organised, or secret,

societies. Secret societies in our tradition are places of education, often in sacred forests or caves. We consider these places as schools because we learn how to do, how to be and how to know.

The relationship with the Divine Principles (God) is governed by a set of sacred activities based on Vodun, Benin's traditional religion. This society understands Vodun as a medium—a metaphysical open door to the Divine Principles and, as such, it represents the most visible and widely shared civilisation trait among our people. The integration of the three pillars has created a tangible organisation marked by the use of a divinatory principle which is known as the Fâ—the establishment and full exercise of the sections of society with a social hierarchy based on knowledge and the right of eldership, a smooth social regulation mechanism embodied by the secret societies and a strong spirituality based on a rich Vodun liturgy.

Endogenous society is organised around that which is concrete and real. It is structured in an almost absolute realism where the abstract is linked to the obvious. Vodun is the main element of spirituality in our endogenous society in Benin, because this cosmic medium is the seat of the vital energy that allows Man to be in contact and in harmony with God—the sole supra-natural force and principle to which all human desires and intentions of humans are destined. The medium guides the development of the individual and his faith in God. Vodun also refers to the deities who are closely bound up with the four universal spiritual entities:

- Fire as *Heviosso*
- Air as *Dan*
- Water as *Tobossou*
- Earth as *Sakpata*

Depending on the lineage of the type of Vodun, the divinity appears or is installed in a particular ecosystem in which it is inte-

grated. This practice thus makes it possible to give each ecosystem a soul and a life in relation to God because, henceforward, it serves as an access to God. Thus, each natural environment that has a spiritual link with a deity or a Vodun is strictly treated and venerated as such.

Zɛkpɔn

In the Awanzan area, near the swamp in the village of Tchakla, in the district of Ouanho and commune of Avrankou in southern Benin, a sacred watering place is home to a particular kind of Vodun called Zɛkpɔn. Although Zɛkpɔn is universal in character and likely to manifest everywhere, the sacred watering hole and associated pantheons are located in what is now the remnant of a forest in Ouanho. In the neighbouring settlements live indigenous populations—mostly fishermen, farmers and craftsmen. Their ancestors are part of the populations of the great waves of immigrants who arrived from Adja-Tado in Togo between the 15th and 16th centuries.

This Divinity, Zɛkpɔn, is the tangible manifestation of the passage and assimilation of what we call a hierophant—an interpreter of sacred mysteries and arcane principles. Benin was visited by these beings, promoters of spirituality in the human world. Zɛkpɔn Adonɔ is the name of the particular hierophant whose transfiguration gave the Vodun Zɛkpɔn which is linked to the sacred water hole. Zɛkpɔn is a deity in the form of a beautiful woman who does good to everyone through water. She is represented with coppery skin, an infectious smile and generous breasts. In fact, she has several breasts, capable of nursing more than two children at a time and she enchants with her mastery of ancestral cooking. Zɛkpɔn means, calm, cool, gentle; Adonɔ means “owner of the hearth which is used to prepare family food” throughout the Adja-Tado civilisation. This heritage, long unknown and yet so important in the lives of people across Benin, is the focus of our

attention in this essay as its history is, in principle, that of most of the deities in the Ouémé and elsewhere. It is also the history of animism, a system in which God and nature are one.

“Thus, each natural environment that has a spiritual link with a deity or a Vodun is strictly treated and venerated as such”

The Ζεκρον Adonon Pantheon

The sacred site Ζεκρον is composed of a set of structures created by both man and nature. Among the elements which make up this site is the Ζεκρον Pantheon. These elements have an exceptional universal value from the historical, ethnological, anthropological and religious point of view. Every year, more than ten thousand visitors come to the site from many different places—Europe, Asia, America and especially Africa. Among the structures of Ζεκρον, you can find:

- the Ζεκρον Daxo: This cosmic representation is erected on the site where Ζεκρον is said to have first disappeared. It embodies the power of divination and, as such, allows consultations to be made for the benefit of the visitor on their return from the water source.
- the Ζεκρον Κρενι: This is a cosmic representation on the ground that embodies the power of healing, especially for children. It provides the sick person with the residue of palm oil that has first been offered as a sacrifice. A little of this product passed over the body strengthens it. It also lowers the

body temperature in sick people and thus soothes and heals them.

- the sacred water Ζεκρῶν: This is located in the swamp in the form of an inexhaustible source of water. This sacred spring is a natural feature surrounded by physical and biological formations that harmonise to give a particularly attractive watery landscape. A quintessentially sacred place, this water source is located in a spiritually secure environment. Access to it is by a mystical door with a purifying and “demining” power, in case the person passing through it is a carrier of occult forces, harmful to the place and to other men. The main role of this door, which consists of two tree legs with a “dezan” cloth (made of palm branches), is to ‘scan’ the passer-by in order to make him/her fit to meet the Ζεκρῶν water spirits. As soon as the threshold of the mystical door is crossed, one is already in Ζεκρῶν Adonῶ’s home, in her intimate domain where everything exudes purity and clarity. The universe in which one is thus immersed is one of deliverance because it is there that God manifests Himself (a perception of the faithful Vodun). The universe is also cultural because all cultural activities, from the point of view of the initiates, need the blessings of mother Ζεκρῶν.

Between the door and the sacred water source, there is a perimeter which demarcates a mystically restricted area which does not suffer from any form of impurity. It is free to enter but not easy for a profaner. This spring has been able to endure over time and ages, despite the constant assaults to which it is subjected by those who seek its services.

Zεκρῶν and the prescriptions of Fâ

Zεκρῶν is said to have contracted a sacred marriage with Zodre, the other hierophant, at the end of which she lived in the simplest

manner, displaying many supernatural and mystical faculties. The two hierophants settled in a forest (which became sacred by virtue of their presence), not far from the water; Zodrē's habitat ("great sacred forest") was on high ground, connected to that of his "wife" ("small sacred forest") by the Hounliho – the sacred path. We should also note that Ζεκρῶν mission was to benefit a community divided and plagued by serious threats and evils of all kinds. That mission had been revealed to the community by the first initiates installed before Ζεκρῶν, some of whom are the precursors of the Bokonon or 'Priests of the Fâ'. They had prophesied the coming of Ζεκρῶν and company as divine salvation to the community, although they did not recognise the signs when she arrived in Ouanho with her retinue.

Upon her installation within the community, Ζεκρῶν immediately began her mission to benefit the community which was already very distressed. To this end, she proved her talents as a doctor, protector, philanthropist and unifier. The results were immediate, for everything came back to life. Vegetation flourished, harvests were plentiful and epidemics and other ills suffered by the people ceased. Likewise, the peddlers of illusions lost face and peace was established in this community for good. In this peaceful community, in exchange for her services, Ζεκρῶν received all manner of grain and animals.

The installation of Ζεκρῶν near a water source surprised many people, especially a source that was, at first, useless. After her installation, this watering place acquired enormous powers, most of which manifested themselves in strange sensations and particular vibrations that made this place a sanctuary and a monastery of great secrets, of great spirituality. In addition to having great beauty, Ζεκρῶν excelled in the cooking of *akla*, the magical fritters made from cowpea and palm oil. The sensations and vibrations, signs of the abundant blessings in her sanctuary, attracted men and women to the water source where she lived. She and

Zodre had abundant and wise offspring. Her children were the origin of the Voduns associated with the Ζεκρον Pantheon.

Ζεκρον led a community life of sharing, solidarity, mutual aid and social cohesion in Ouanho. She visited people who were suffering and shared their pain. She also visited sick people and brought them effective remedies. On her way, she especially offered *akla*. At the time of slavery, she saved her people thanks to *akla* and the water of the magic well, Ahoanlègô.

Threats to Ζεκρον: lack of legal protection

Natural sacred places are precious. They support and sustain life in all its forms. Yet they are under threat throughout the world – from development, extractive industries and deforestation. Ζεκρον is no exception. The place where the village is situated used to be a large forest with sacred squares and plazas made up of large trees. But that is not the situation today.

Today, the sacred water source of Ζεκρον is threatened. In the first place, the site is not yet fully secured. There are internal threats to this Indigenous and Community Conserved Area (ICCA), in the form of land grabbing of the area and the reduction of the original Ζεκρον space. The previously large forest around Ζεκρον has been replaced by agricultural fields. The large sacred trees have mostly been destroyed. The initiation convents in the forest have been reduced to islands with a few shrubs. Access roads are impassable during the rainy season.

The communities with a spiritual link to the site perpetuate the rituals and protect what remains of the site. They are permanently on site to accompany visitors in their prayers or rituals to the Ζεκρον pool. Although the governance around Ζεκρον is currently communal and based on ancestral know-how, the Commune of Avrankou, after deliberation by the Communal Council, has nonetheless made a decree noting the protection and safeguarding of this site. But this decree does not prevent human pressure:

the biggest mammal destroying the forest around Ζεκρῶν is Man.

The other threat to Ζεκρῶν is the lack of government recognition – the fact that it has not been brought into the protected area system. Thus, the fact that this is an Indigenous and Community Heritage Area is “invisible” from a legal perspective, allowing other, stronger actors to make forced interventions into the area to grab resources and land through the process of land allotment. Sacred sites should be conserved and safeguarded during the subdivision process. They should be exempt from the rules which allow the state to claim a part of the area.

Despite the communal decrees, no sacred forest, for example, has been included in the protected areas by the State. For a better recognition of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas, local elected officials and civil society organisations must support indigenous peoples in lobbying and advocacy so that a clear and explicit law is passed to safeguard and protect sacred and fragile ecosystems such as Ζεκρῶν and the relics of the forest that remain around this sacred pool.

Conclusion:

God, in creating each continent, provided all the mechanisms for spiritual and social regulation. Nature, a unique divine force, has always functioned according to laws which together form the Divine Principle. Each man or human being has an inner Master who, in spite of himself, intercedes for him with the Divine Principle. Faced with our destiny, when each of us performs an act, whether social or spiritual, the significance of this act is measured by whether or not it conforms to the laws of nature. Unfortunately, we do great violence to the Nature that saw us being born and will one day see us depart. By looking closely at oneself, and without any hypocrisy, one must realise the existence of a simple and adequate mechanism; a mechanism capable of refocusing the individual with his inner Master so that this Master puts the indi-

vidual back on the divine axis, so that he benefits again from the grace of the very high. In this way he would have been brought back into harmony with nature and, therefore, with his fellow human beings.

“All over the Earth are sacred places, which help us to respect and revere the living world and live in harmony and peace. But we also need the law to reflect this ancient knowledge and support community in this the largest sense, the community of life”

When the individual makes the lethal choice to distance himself from himself, and consequently from his society, from nature, he loses all spiritual contact. He lives a hermetic existence, making life difficult in terms of the quality of his interpersonal communication. Also societies can distance themselves from nature. When we humans destroy the non-humans (water, air, land, plants, animals, etc) with whom we share this Earth, our lives are also threatened. We must stop ecocide if we are to claim to live on this Earth. It is a mistake to believe that we are superior to other non-humans. All over the Earth are sacred places, which help us to respect and revere the living world and live in harmony and peace. But we also need the law to reflect this ancient knowledge and support community in this the largest sense, the community of life. Making ecocide an international crime would send a

strong signal that there is a line beyond which destructive actions are unacceptable and encourage a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with the natural – and sacred – world.

The recent example and reminder of our unhealthy relationship with nature is COVID-19, which has blocked us all for a while. We have to create harmony with nature to live happily because the Earth can live without humans, but our life depends totally on it and on other non-humans. We have certain rights on this Earth but the non-humans, who are our ancestors, also have rights and we have the duty to respect them. If we have to pay for the air we breathe, have a bill for the sunlight, pay for the water we use, and pay to walk on the Earth, who among us, however rich, will be able to afford it? Human-Nature harmony is essential for human life because we are Earth and will return to Earth.

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**Indigenous Vodun perspective:
The Sacred Pool “Zεκρον Adon»**

- 57 Endogenous practice here refers to practice based on the knowledge, wisdom and culture of the peoples of Africa, acquired and developed over millennia.

We, as people of faith,

- are deeply concerned about the ongoing destruction of our home, the Earth.***
- demand a global response to prevent mass damage and destruction of ecosystems: Ecocide.***
- support creating legal protection for life on Earth by including Ecocide as a crime against peace under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.***

In this time of ecological crisis, life is threatened on a global scale. We are at the crossroads; it is time to raise our voices for the respect and protection of nature. Faith communities have a unique voice for the reverence of the living world and the gift of hope that we can rise to the occasion. Humanity has developed a dazzling diversity of faith traditions and ways of worshipping and celebrating life. This volume contains a remarkable collection of perspectives from a few of them. The authors, distinguished faith leaders and indigenous wisdom keepers, each draw on the wisdom of their own tradition. Yet the essence of their message is the same: to protect our common home, ecocide must become an international crime.

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