
**The Role of Religion in Linking Conservation
and Development: Challenges and Opportunities***

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Abstract

The world's religions have made a contribution to environmental conservation and sustainable development through faith-based non-governmental organizations. Partnerships between secular conservation and development organizations and faith-based groups, however, are not always easy. Such partnerships face various challenges, including differences in worldviews, conflict between identities, and the attitudes and behavior of religious groups that may not be favorable to conservation and development. Despite a possible overlap of values, these incompatibilities can often cause tensions between secular organizations and religious groups. A number of examples, however, suggest that faith-based groups are starting to address these incompatibilities. We suggest that partnerships with faith groups might be valuable because these groups can

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enhance public support for conservation and development. While secular organizations need to work with faith groups on the basis of shared ethical or moral values, identifying effective ways to strengthen the linkages between secular organizations and faith groups is also necessary.

Introduction

A variety of individuals and groups affiliated with what are conventionally called 'world religions' have provided moral inspiration for historically notable partnerships focusing on sustainable development and environmental conservation. Examples include: Oxfam (Oxford Committee for Famine Relief), which was initiated in 1942 by the Oxford University Vicar Canon Milford and now works in over one hundred countries across the developing world and has an annual budget of over \$300 million (Oxfam 2010); the Aga Khan Development Network, started by a spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, which, with an annual budget of over \$450 million, helps to bring together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programs that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa (AKDN 2010); the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), which in 1986 initiated a dialogue with five of the world's most prominent religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism—about how the tenets of their faiths could help environmental conservation; and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which was formed in 1995 to enhance links between secular organizations engaged in conservation and what its leaders considered to be the world's major faiths (ARC 2010). The efforts of these non-governmental organizations to link religion to conservation and development were further spurred by an important initiative undertaken in 1997 by James D. Wolfensohn, then the President of the World Bank, and George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury (United Kingdom), who organized a meeting that brought together senior leaders from major world faiths. This meeting forged greater links between conservation and development organizations and faith groups under the auspices of the World Bank. This collaboration has facilitated discussion of ways in which religious groups could help conservation and development (WFDD 2009). The World Bank has since been working with faith-based groups to reduce poverty and to promote conservation in the developing world.

A growing body of literature has suggested that conservation and development are both driven by ethical or moral values and can earn legitimacy through cultural acceptance, public engagement, and mass support (Votrin 2005; Orrnert 2006; Van Houtan 2006; Child 2009; de

Groot and Steg 2009; De Cordier 2009). Many of the world's predominant religions promote moral codes of conduct and have played a role in supporting environmental conservation (Boyd 1984; Kinsley 1994; Palmer and Finlay 2003) and sustainable development (Taylor 1995; White and Tiongco 1997; Belshaw *et al.* 2001). Can this also make religious groups potential partners in future conservation and development programs? While we acknowledge that religions are internally diverse, with competing versions and perspectives, some forms of which are more amenable to environmentalist concern than others (Beyer 1992; Taylor 2005, 2010), our objective is to examine critically whether partnerships with institutional religions are worthwhile and whether they are likely to benefit outreach and action by secular conservation and development organizations.

We first examine **challenges in** forming partnerships with faith groups. Although there is literature suggesting that religion has played a role in conservation and development (Selinger 2004; Haar and Ellis 2006; Gottlieb 2007; Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, and Mansourian 2009), problems in forming partnerships with faith groups have also been acknowledged (Clarke 2007; Foltz and Saadi-nejad 2007; Peterson and Liu 2008; Winkler 2008). Second, while the probability of achieving objectives associated with conservation and development is greater if the two are approached synergistically (Becker 2003; Adams *et al.* 2004; Johannesen and Skonhoft 2005; Fisher and Christopher 2007), **it remains to be seen whether religion can provide a common moral framework for action and why it might be critically important to do so in comparison to non-religious organizations**. We therefore examine the possible role of religion in enhancing linkages between conservation and development. Third, we review examples of collaboration between conservation and development organizations and faith groups, and evaluate future opportunities for enhancing such partnerships.

Linking Conservation and Development with Religion

There is debate as to whether conservation and development should be linked. After years of minimal community involvement in conservation programs, many integrated conservation and development projects (**ICDPs**) were implemented during the 1980s and 1990s to meet the dual objectives of biodiversity conservation and community development (Hughes and Flintan 2001). The thought was that by connecting people with conservation, and providing incentives for conservation in the form of community development or poverty-alleviation initiatives such as building schools, providing sanitation, or alternative livelihoods options,

the pressures on protected areas by adjacent communities would be reduced. In some cases this connection between conservation priorities and development projects did work and led to successful conservation projects as well as community development (for example, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, Nepal—see Stevens 1997). In other cases, there was confusion either because the conservation initiatives and rural development projects were de-linked in the minds of local residents, there were accusations of mismanagement of development funds, or in the worst case scenarios, those development projects adjacent to parks actually attracted migrants to protected area borders to receive the development benefits, in turn putting additional pressures on park resources (Peters 1998; Terborgh *et al.* 2002; Scholte 2003).

After two decades of debate over whether to integrate conservation and development, there is now a general consensus among scholars that despite challenges in effective governance, conservation and development need to be approached synergistically because without the alleviation of poverty, conservation is unlikely to be successful (Becker 2003; Adams *et al.* 2004; Johannesen and Skonhoft 2005; Fisher and Christopher 2007). Poverty, coupled with population growth and pressures to industrialize, can often be counterproductive to conservation of natural resources. Although development in the conventional sense often aims to industrialize societies and bring them out of poverty, and industrialization is often destructive to the natural environment (Beyer 1992), our use of the word 'development' does not mean the Western model of energy intensive and industrial development which follows a fossil-fuel driven energy-intensive approach, but **one** that puts emphasis on improving the lives of the poor people in a manner that is sustainable to the natural environment. Therefore, we see the motivation behind linking conservation and development as simultaneously to improve the lives of the poor and the natural environment (Adams *et al.* 2004). While we acknowledge that the concepts of both 'conservation' and 'development' are highly contested (e.g. Roe and Elliot 2010), we take conservation to mean protection of the living environment, and development to mean the improvement of the lives of the poor by way of improving the environment in which they live. We focus on eleven of the world's religious faiths, namely Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism (ARC 2010), while acknowledging that some nature religions, such as Animism or Paganism, are often viewed as promoting ways of living in harmony with their natural environment (Taylor 2005). The reason we focus on the faiths identified above is because some estimates suggest that over 80% of the world's population subscribes to

one or another of them, and even if many of those affiliated with these religions do not strictly adhere to them, they render at least a background ethical perspective to over four billion people in the world (O'Brien and Palmer 2007).

The key question we address is whether religion can provide an overarching moral framework for action that intersects environmental conservation and sustainable development. Following Adams *et al.* (2004), Johannesen and Skonhoft (2005), Fisher and Christopher (2007), and a number of others, we assume that there are advantages in approaching conservation and development synergistically. We seek to examine challenges, as well as opportunities, in linking conservation and development with religion.

Conflict of Religion with Conservation and Development

Despite enthusiasm for linking conservation and development with religion, it must be acknowledged that partnerships between faith groups and conservation-development organizations are not always easy. Even though religions advocate ethical and moral values, some scholars (Foltz and Saadi-nejad 2007; Winkler 2008; Hall, Grim, and Tucker 2009; Plant 2009) have argued that these may not necessarily translate into action, and the reasons underlying the attitudes of different religions toward conservation can vary widely. For example, an anthropocentric mainstream Muslim position is that humanity has responsibility for Allah's creation, which has been given to humans as a gift. At the other end of the spectrum, the biocentric Jain belief advocates that every being—animal, plant, or human—has a soul and should be treated with respect (Hall, Grim, and Tucker 2009). Foltz and Saadi-nejad (2007) discuss Zoroastrianism, a religion that respects and protects many aspects of nature including certain species (e.g. cows and dogs are considered sacred). However, Zoroastrianism also posits an ongoing struggle between the forces of good and evil; certain species groups (e.g. ants, snakes) are seen as evil and are thus to be destroyed whenever possible. Religious affiliation therefore does not always promote pro-environment behavior.

Similarly, religions may not always support development activities that focus on poverty alleviation—faith traditions are different from one another in this respect (Plant 2009). Dinham and Lowndes (2008) suggest that because beliefs and practices vary within and between different faith communities, the success of religion-development partnerships will depend on the socio-political context within which faiths are situated. Haar and Ellis (2006), for example, argue that religious ideas are often

relevant to development thinking and therefore religion can play an important role in sustainable development. Winkler (2008), on the other hand, found no evidence of poverty reduction despite community development efforts in an area with a widespread presence of churches of various denominations in an inner-city neighborhood in South Africa. Flying in the face of enthusiasm for religion–state partnership in social welfare and development in the wider South African context, the burgeoning faith sector in this neighborhood was marred by competing faith identities, exclusionary ideologies, and instability, and consequently it was unable to implement a coherent program of poverty reduction (Winkler 2008). Religious institutions, therefore, may not always help in achieving development objectives.

For religious institutions, promoting the practice of religion does not often include promoting environmental concerns (e.g. Tomalin 2002, 2009; Foltz and Saadi-nejad 2007; Winkler 2008). Scholarly literature even suggests that religion might be incompatible with conservation and development on various accounts, which can be broadly grouped into three categories: (1) differences in worldviews, (2) conflict between identities, and (3) divergent attitudes and behavior. There are different societal scales at which these three incompatibilities operate. While all three are somewhat linked with each other, differences in worldviews pertain mainly to the presence or absence of God. Conflict between identities arises because of adherence to different Gods, while attitudes and behavior are driven both by the worldview and the identity of a religious group or individual. Therefore, differences in worldviews might affect interaction between religious and secular groups within society, while conflict between identities might affect interaction between two religious groups. The attitudes and behavior of individuals often determine whether religious and secular values and practices are compatible. **These incompatibilities together influence the dynamics between individuals, between religious groups and within society.**

1. Differences in Worldviews

Different worldviews of religious groups and conservationists often make religion and conservation incompatible (Ruse 2005). Darwin's theory of evolution (Darwin 1859), for example, was interpreted by some as a challenge to religious beliefs about the creation of the world by God and the superiority of humans over other forms of life (Dunlap 1988). However, the differences in worldview arise not just between religious vs. secular groups, but also between religions. For example, many religions consider the sacred to be above or beyond the earth, which leads to differences between religions that consider the earth sacred in

some way, and those that do not (Taylor 2010). Similarly, religion is often considered incompatible with certain development strategies. Selinger (2004), for example, argues that the modernization paradigm of the twentieth century, which assumed that with assistance poor countries could be developed in the same manner as rich countries, has been a key development strategy. Most development interventions aim to promote economic growth while sidelining cultural values in society. Furthermore, many secular development organizations do not want to be seen working with a religious organization no matter how much influence faith groups have on local culture. As a result of this, religion—although an important force within many cultures—is marginalized. According to Ver Beek (2002), the reason for this marginalization is the dichotomization between sacred and secular in socio-political, and often religious, thought.

2. Conflict between Identities

Although there is substantial overlap in the ethical and moral values advocated by different religions, there is also a long history of conflict between religions (Kaplan 2007). It has been suggested that these conflicts originate in strong religious identities, which, when threatened, result in inter-group hostilities (e.g. Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman 2010). Such strong identities might therefore be counter-productive to communicating a conservation message to mixed audiences consisting of members drawn from different faiths. Similarly, strong religious identities can be counterproductive to successful implementation of development programs. Winkler's (2008) example of an inner-city neighborhood in South Africa, where competing religious identities were detrimental to neighborhood-wide anti-poverty campaigns, is illustrative. Clarke (2007) argues that the involvement of faith-based organizations in development raises concerns among some donors, who do not want to support organizations that actively proselytize or denigrate other faiths. Such actions can lead to faith-based tensions in some of the poorest and most culturally sensitive countries in the world (e.g. Vilaca and Wright 2009).

3. Divergent Attitudes and Behavior

Although most religions advocate ethical and moral values, these values may not always promote pro-environment behavior. Peterson and Liu (2008) examined the environmental worldviews of various social groups in the Teton Valley of Idaho and Wyoming, USA. After controlling for demographic factors, they found that environmental behavior is not positively correlated to religiosity and those not affiliated with

organized religion were the most environmentally concerned and active (Peterson and Liu 2008). Tomalin (2004) provides an example of sacred grove conservation discourse in India, and argues that while protection of sacred groves has been touted as an example of Hindu religious environmentalism, the attitudes and behavior of a majority of middle-class elite Hindus do not demonstrate awareness of the environmental ethic of using natural resources responsibly. Similarly, religious attitudes and behavior are not always complementary to certain paradigms of sustainable development. In 2002, for example, the evangelical Christian President of the USA, George Bush, launched **Faith-Based and Community Initiatives** with a view to providing federal funding to faith-based organizations involved in combating social problems such as homelessness in the United States. In the same year, however, the administration withdrew international aid to US agencies either supporting or providing abortion services, casting a serious blow to population control and poverty reduction efforts in many developing countries (Crane and Dussenberry 2004). Critics have therefore argued that such interference of religious attitudes and behavior in aid agencies' work can be detrimental to sustainable development efforts.

These incompatibilities might suggest that faith groups might not be good partners in conservation and development programs. However, a wide variety of secular conservation and development organizations have shown increasing interest in forming partnerships with faith groups (CII 2005; WFDD 2009; WWF 2009; DDVE 2010). In the following sections we suggest that, in order to work effectively with faith groups, secular organizations will need to recognize that there are important intersections in the ethical and moral values undergirding conservation, development, and religion.

Overlap of Ethical Values in Conservation, Development, and Religion

Although the world's longstanding and predominant religions are in decline in many areas of the world (most dramatically in Northern and Western Europe), Taylor (2010) argues that there is still a desire among those who eschew such religions for a spiritually meaningful understanding of the world, or even the universe, and the human place in it. Some within the world's predominant religions have demonstrated an increasing affinity towards some forms of nature spirituality and are engaging in practices that are understood as 'green' (Taylor 2005, 2010). Influential thinkers have suggested that ethical or moral values can play an important role in developing compassion toward non-human species (e.g. Wilson 1984) and toward fellow human beings (e.g. Sen 1999). Such

values also therefore underpin both conservation (compassion towards non-human species) and development (compassion towards fellow human beings). Although the histories of modern-day conservation and development are complex, brevity requires that in the following examination of the origins of the ethical and moral values, we identify only key historical watersheds.

The modern-day Western conservation ethic arose with the emergence during the late nineteenth century of the **wilderness protection** movement in the United States. Although in the seventeenth century, some Puritans viewed nature with foreboding, by the nineteenth century, figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir transformed the American view of wilderness into something of great spiritual value (Schmitt 1969; Nash 2001; Callicott 2008; Taylor 2010). This ethic, articulated most forcefully by Thoreau and Muir in the nineteenth century, acknowledges the moral right of non-human species to inhabit the Earth and aims to set aside areas for their preservation. By the late nineteenth century, such values began to influence public policies promoting the protection of nature in the USA. Muir was especially influential in the political realm, founding the Sierra Club, and advocating for the protection of wilderness through the creation of national parks (Muir 1901 [1998]; Fox 1985; Nash 2001; Callicott 2008), but during the twentieth century, many other figures, most notably Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson, effectively championed environmental conservation, and, in diverse ways, linked their cause to spiritual or religious perceptions (Schmitt 1969; Fox 1985; Oelschlaeger 1991; Nash 2001; Gatta 2004; Taylor 2010). Over time, the term 'conservation' has come to refer to all environmental protection efforts. Although some indigenous and native communities around the world developed environmentally sustainable ways of living, such cultures have often come into conflict with the modern Western conservation apparatus, but increasingly, traditional methods of conservation and involvement by local communities are valued by conservationists as key elements of conservation strategies (Wild and McLeod 2009).

International development theory as an academic discipline emerged first in the nineteenth century (Selinger 2004). However, with the rise of free market economic policies, and the globalization and growth of the corporate sector in the twentieth century, funding for development became closely tied to economic growth as a central objective. After World War II, the modernization paradigm, that is, assisting poor countries to develop in the same manner as rich countries, became the most important academic discourse in development (Bernstein 1971).

Reviewing historical paradigms in international development, however, Schuurman (2000) argues that due to globalization the modernization paradigm lost its dominance. The contemporary approach to development, as a result, acknowledges the moral right of all human beings to social justice and a belief in the capacity of human beings to shape their own progress, instead of assuming that poor countries should engage in development in the same fashion as affluent ones. The twenty-first-century approach to development, particularly that advocated by the United Nations, asserts that 'only with a universal morality of justice is there a future for humanity' (Schuurman 2000: 19). The challenge for sustainable development in less developed countries, however, is to reduce poverty without increasing the environmental impact. Rees argues that 'Sustainability with social justice can be achieved only through an unprecedented level of international cooperation rooted in a sense of compassion for both other peoples and other species' (2002: 15). This contemporary approach to development resonates with the ethical positions that are assumed by some religions.

Although religions vary in their ethical positions (Morgan and Lawton 2007) there are some themes found within the world's major religions that can be understood in ways that cohere with the most common, global, understandings of the ethics of conservation and development. Given the wide variety of values found in the world's diverse religions, a thorough examination of their ethical positions is beyond the scope of the current analysis. Instead, we postulate where we think there are values that can provide common ground between people variously involved in religion, conservation, and development. We focus only on a few elements common in religious ethics that are relevant to environmental conservation and sustainable development: stewardship, reverence for nature, altruism, and compassion.

Ecological advocates within many religions adhere to the principle of stewardship of nature or the idea that nature should be revered. The Abrahamic traditions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—all tend to centre their environmental ethic on the concept of stewardship, and, therefore, the upkeep and management of nature as the responsibility of humans. Religions originating in Asia, and some indigenous religions, by way of contrast, often tend to emphasize the divinity in nature, its forces, or its creatures. All of these religions, in various ways (and sometimes with unfortunate exclusions), tend to value altruistic behaviors and consider compassion a virtue, sometimes even compassion toward non-human beings (Schuurman 2000). These sorts of themes can inspire environmental concern and action (e.g. Palmer and Finlay 2003; Tucker and Grim 2004; Gottlieb 2007; Colwell *et al.* 2009).

*Can Faith Groups make an Important Contribution
to Conservation and Development?*

It is clear that there are ethical values that faith groups can bring to conservation and development efforts. We now turn to examine the links between ethical or moral values, and activities of faith groups. The values of compassion toward others, and the stewardship of nature, that are often found in religions, have motivated and continue to motivate many faith-based organizations to engage in environmental conservation and sustainable development. At the same time, prominent conservation organizations (CII 2005; WWF 2009) have mutual interest in forming partnerships with faith-based groups. Similarly, the World Bank's Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics (DDVE 2010) has successfully enlisted the support and involvement of religious leaders and organizations in starting to address the Millennium Development Goals in some of the poorest countries in the world. Many examples suggest that religious groups are attempting to address perceived incompatibilities between their values and practices and those of secular conservation and development organizations.

1. Differences in Worldviews

Despite differences in worldviews, in some regions religious organizations are working co-operatively. For example, Christian organizations, such as Plant with Purpose, have taken direct conservation action by planting trees in a wide range of developing countries across the world (Floresta 2008), even though Christianity is a minority religion in many of these countries. Members of other religions including Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Islam have put their differences in worldviews aside and found a common moral ground, and are now cooperating in environmental conservation and sustainable development projects (Vigne and Martin 2000; ARC 2004, 2006; CII 2005; WWF 2009; Basil 2010). The World Council of Churches includes churches with over 560 million members (WCC 2010). Despite denominational differences within it, this organization is engaged in various development activities. Both the Women, Faith and Development Alliance and the World Conference of Religions for Peace have institutional members from different faith groups working together (WFDA 2010; WCRP 2010).

2. Conflict between Identities

Many faith groups have attempted to leave aside conflict between identities and have jointly contributed to ethical investments. The

International Interfaith Investment Group (3iG 2010), for example, has been instrumental in encouraging substantial investments from religious organizations in environmentally responsible and ethical projects (Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, and Mansourian 2009). Although inter-religious conflicts do arise due to the sectarianism and fundamentalism found in most religions, consolidated actions such as 3iG suggest that some faith groups are able to overcome their strong identities and faith-related tensions and **are able to co-operate**. The Community of Sant'Egidio, a movement which has its origins in the Catholic Church, is actively engaged in brokering peace in situations of inter-religious conflict (Sant'Egidio 2010). The annual Prayer for Peace organized by this community has become a prominent global interfaith meeting where many groups work co-operatively.

3. Divergent Attitudes and Behavior

Many faith groups are making efforts to change the attitudes and behaviors of their members. Conservation-focused education programs undertaken by Islamic religious leaders in Pakistan or Malaysia are illustrative (Sheikh 2006; WWF 2009). Similarly, active forest protection efforts by individuals from faiths including Buddhism, Daoism, and Hinduism (ARC 2004, 2006; CII 2005; Bhagwat and Rutte 2006; Chimesengee *et al.* 2009; Ormsby and Bhagwat 2010) also suggest that stronger pro-environment attitudes and behaviors are emerging. Initiatives such as the World Faiths Development Dialogue attempt to bridge faith-based and mainstream development, thereby changing the attitudes of secular development organizations towards faith groups and vice versa (WFDD 2009).

Examples of Faith Groups Involved in Organic Agriculture

One sector where faith groups have been successful in promoting conservation and development is organic agriculture. The present model of industrialized, export-oriented agriculture has increased world food production, but has not always benefited rural communities, particularly in the developing world (Pretty 2002). Furthermore, intensive agricultural practices alongside heavy use of artificial chemical fertilizers and pesticides have resulted in ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss (Carson 1962; Tilman *et al.* 2002). A search for sustainable agricultural practices has often pointed to small-scale organic methods, which are less efficient than industrialized agriculture, but more suitable for small-scale farming particularly in developing countries (Pretty 2007). In addition, small-scale agriculture is considered a way of making rural

communities self-sufficient, thereby enhancing their food security (Scialabba 2007).

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) suggests that this form of agriculture relies on ecological processes, biodiversity, and crop cycles adapted to local conditions rather than on using artificial inputs that can have adverse effects on ecological processes. According to IFOAM, this form of agriculture sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people by combining tradition, innovation, and science to benefit the environment and by promoting fair trade to improve the quality of life of the rural poor. Organic agriculture worldwide is developing rapidly, with 35 million hectares now managed organically, representing approximately 0.8 percent of total world farmland (IFOAM 2010). When viewed as an alternative to modern, intensive agriculture systems, organic agriculture invites criticism because of the concerns over meeting the food demands of the world's rapidly growing population. However, there is increasing evidence from Africa and elsewhere in the developing world that organic agriculture can play its part in feeding the world and in meeting various sustainability goals, from water conservation and improved soil quality to delivering higher levels of employment and conservation of biodiversity (FAO-UNEP 2008; Jhamtani 2010). Furthermore, the International Labor Organization recognizes the benefits of organic farming for secure and sustainable employment and conditions of work (ILO 2010); and the United Nations Environment Program is currently examining the potential economic, employment and environmental benefits of greater investment in sustainable agriculture in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (UNEP 2010).

Various faith communities around the world have started to promote organic farming through public education programs or by managing their own agricultural lands organically. These include faith groups in the developed and the developing world. The Orthodox women's monastery of Ormylia, Greece, for example, introduced organic farming in 1991 on the monastery's existing agricultural lands, based on the need to 'celebrate and preserve nature while engaging in sound ecological practices designed to protect that very environment' (Goarch 2010). The goal of Project Ormylia is to act as a focus and catalyst, initially for nearby monasteries (e.g. Simonopetra Monastery on Mount Athos), and subsequently for the surrounding community. The Christian Andechs Monastery in Bavaria, Germany, holds 110 hectares of cultivated land that has been managed organically since 1995. The motivation behind the shift in agricultural practice to an approach that calls for extra care

and restraint in dealing with nature is based on Andechs' aim of 'doing justice to the task of preserving God's creation' (Andechs 2010).

More importantly, from the conservation and development perspectives, there are examples of faith groups promoting organic agriculture in the developing world. In 2005, an organic farming training program run by the Orthodox Church in Assela, Ethiopia, introduced farmers, clergy, and community leaders to alternative and improved methods of agriculture. The Ethiopian Church, pointing to the biblical mandate of concern and care for the environment, states that it sees caring for nature as part of its sacred mission and duty (ARC 2005). In 2006, the Hindu community's International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) founded a training centre for organic agriculture on the outskirts of Mysore, Karnataka, India. Named Basil Academy, this organization runs 'Eco Agri Research Foundation', which aims to 'make the farmer a responsible, respected member of society who plays a significant role in protecting and sustaining our planet and its people' (Basil 2010). Such initiatives in developing countries are contributing to environmental conservation and economic development for the rural poor.

Although no data are available on the land mass cultivated organically by religious organizations, considering that nearly 15% of the Earth's land surface is under the influence of religious or sacred institutions (Bhagwat and Palmer 2009), faith communities can play an important role in conservation and development if they manage their farmland organically. The examples discussed above also suggest that the motivations for many of these practices arise from ethical and moral values. These examples also indicate that tangible opportunities exist for religious and secular groups to collaborate. IFOAM's (2010) advocacy campaigns on food security, climate change, or biodiversity, for example, could benefit from partnerships with faith groups that are actively working in these areas. Similarly, ILO's (2010) or UNEP's (2010) campaigns to generate economic, employment, and environmental benefits through sustainable agricultural practices will benefit from partnerships with faith groups.

Strengthening Linkages with Faith Groups

While environmental conservation and sustainable development are in need of greater public support, which faith groups might well be able to provide, there are a number of things that secular conservation and development organizations can in turn do to enhance linkages with religious organizations. This can be brought about by establishing strong working relationships with faith groups, leaders, and adherents. To this

effect, focusing on the common ground between ethical or moral values advocated by religious groups and conservation and development organizations might be necessary, rather than dwelling on incompatibilities. 'Planetary stewardship' as a framework for science and society to reduce rapidly anthropogenic damage to the biosphere (*sensu* Power and Chapin 2009), for example, has shared subtext with the Abrahamic religions' ideology of 'stewardship of nature'. Identification of synergies between religious programs and conservation and/or development initiatives is likely to help establish a common ground between faith groups and secular organizations. There are two areas in which such synergies can be explored: (1) outreach and education and (2) action.

1. *Outreach and Education*

Religious leaders can be important agents in effectively communicating issues in conservation and development, and their support is often necessary for outreach activities. Faith group leaders are conversant with their group's vocabulary and are most effective in communication, knowing what is evocative to their religious audience. For example, phrases such as 'the creation' and 'creation care' are helpful to communicate a conservation message when working with Abrahamic religions (Wilson 2006). In addition to faith group leaders, involvement of institutions such as religious colleges, universities, and training centers in conservation and development activities might be an effective way of reaching out to the target audience. It is also vitally important to develop training material in environmental conservation and sustainable development for faith groups. Each group in the US-based National Religious Partnership for the Environment, for example, has resource kits enabling congregations to integrate environmental concerns (Gorman 2009). Such material is not yet available for other religions and in other parts of the world, but the development of this type of material might be an effective way for conservation and development organizations to reach out to religious groups.

2. *Action*

While religious audiences may be able to identify with ethical or moral values of environmental conservation and development, their own faith is often their primary concern (e.g. Tomalin 2002). Furthermore, religious groups might place high value on maintaining a separate cultural identity. When planning activities with faith groups, it is essential to recognize this and to respect social and cultural boundaries in order to initiate effective partnerships. However, it might be important to encourage religious groups to create opportunities for dialogue across

faiths and with secular organizations so as to dissolve the social and cultural boundaries. The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC 2010), a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programs, based on their own core teachings, is notable in this respect. This organization actively creates opportunities for predominant religious faiths around the world to promote environmental conservation and sustainable development, and, occasionally, to encounter one another. Effective action for helping conservation and development in most cases, therefore, seems to demand changes in attitudes and behaviors from religious adherents and secular organizations alike. Such changes can be brought about by highlighting success stories where adherents are shown examples of people of their own faith engaging in conservation and development activities (e.g. Kula 2001). This way of encouraging participation is often effective because members of the same faith group share the strongest cultural associations with each other. Similarly, there is need for empathy and an open mind towards faith groups on the part of conservation and development volunteers, professionals, NGOs, and donors. Finally, it is important to help religious leaders to establish common ground between their practices and those that help environmental conservation and sustainable development. Although this might often require redefining conservation and development, it is also likely to ensure that collaborative actions with faith groups are most effective.

Conclusions

Despite these examples, it should be acknowledged that there is no direct causal effect of faith on conservation and development, or at least one that has not yet been demonstrated by social scientists. Nor is there concrete evidence that individuals or organizations affiliated with religions are more likely to be concerned about the environment than those who are not. It is possible that faith groups are simply embracing ideas and practices that are popular or generally accepted in society. On the other hand, the examples discussed above suggest that ethical or moral values related to conservation and development may at least sometimes play a role in the faith groups' choice of ideas and practices. This fact signals important possibilities, since over 80% of the world's population is affiliated with the religious faiths that are here under discussion: over four billion people have ethical perspectives rooted in these religious traditions (Bhagwat, Dudley, and Harrop 2011). These examples thus suggest that, over time, dramatic public action may

emerge, at least in part, due to religious values and from the world's predominant religious faith traditions.

Many non-governmental organizations as well as prominent donors, such as the World Bank, concur that faith groups are important potential partners in conservation and development. There are increasing examples in which religious individuals and groups express ethical and moral values and engage in activities with precisely such objectives. While there are challenges in forming partnerships—including differences in worldviews, conflict between identities, and divergent attitudes and behavior—it is possible for conservation and development practitioners to work with religious individuals and groups to promote environmental values and sustainable development. As the examples we have provided suggest, some faith-based groups recognize and are addressing incompatibilities between their own values and practices and those of secular conservation and development organizations. This has enabled religious and secular organizations to establish a common ground based on shared ethical and moral values. Although such partnerships have a mixed record, it is possible for secular conservation and development organizations to strengthen linkages with faith groups in the cause of environmental protection and sustainable development.

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