

the citizens would undoubtedly do all in their power to find a solution. Every individual and every household would make the necessary changes in lifestyle because all

would know the terrible consequences of inaction.

Similarly, if the problem were confined to one nation, the government and the people of that nation would work together to solve it. Laws would be passed.

Lifestyles would be changed.

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Reflections on Climate Change

But the problem of climate change is global and the nations have so far failed to act with the unity required to solve it.

Achieving a degree of material, organizational unity sufficient to combat global climate change will require new institutions and a new way of thinking. The Baha'i writings call for the establishment of an international legislature and a comprehensive code of international law adequate to combat the global problems we now face. In the words of Baha'u'llah: "The Earth is but one country and mankind its

the organic oneness of the entire human race.

A Christian response begins in

Alan Race

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Christian Cross; photo, movement

from
citizens.” But that alone is not enough. Cetta Kenney
garden to city is
Indeed, without an inner unity it would a metaphor for the journey from
simbe impossible. This inner unity requires plicity to complexity, from
countryside
us all to widen the circle of our loyalty to urban environment, then in
relation
beyond our race, beyond our nation and to climate change we have a
problem.
even beyond our religion. It calls us back For while there is no returning to
the
to the fundamental meaning of the word countryside-garden innocence of
pre-
“religion” – to bind together. industrial human living, the
urban-city
In this day the highest manifesta- has become so compromised as an image
tion of religion should be our being of human flourishing that we are
left
bound together as one human family, scrabbling around for an image
that
unified in all our rich diversity. might be worthy of a future worth
Of course, there are those who say inhabiting.
that human nature is incorrigibly self- Yet the garden lives on in
the city
ish and that we will therefore never and the city invades the garden.
The
be sufficiently united to resolve these question is one of balance: how to
celissues. Paradoxically, this belief tends ebrate the city without the
romanticism
to push people towards a paralysis of of the garden and how to honour
the
will and itself becomes an obstacle to garden without losing the vitality
of
progress. On this the Baha’i writings the city. I believe that this
balance can
point towards hope. Just as the human be achieved by contemplation of
three
race has progressed in the past, widen- guiding values: mutuality,
interconnecting circles of loyalty from the tribe to edness and
responsibility. Let me take
the city state, from the city state to the each in turn.
nation, so, Baha’u’llah states, will we First, mutuality. A new
phrase has
progress again, towards a realisation of been coined in Christian circles
during

Alan Race

the environmental campaigns of recent years – climate justice. We think of beauty, truth and goodness – spirit and wisdom, if you prefer – are reflected in beings within and between communities, establishing access to the world's goods and services and sharing their benefits. In the light of struggles for justice between cultural, ethnic and religious policies in religious groups, nationally and internationally, we are learning that the same basis for struggles are inherent in the dynamics of human-made climate change. The rich world has produced the carbon and perthe poor world bears the negative consequences with their loss of livelihood and sustainability. To be set free from the ravages of climate change is a cry for justice. The language of justice at the heart of all Christian liberation theologies has entered the environmental lexicon and is binding all of earth's communities in relationships of mutual accountability. Second, interconnectedness. In the withlight of cosmological and evolutionary sciences the Christian doctrine of

spiritual way of capturing this interconnectedness. God's and goodness – spirit and you prefer – are reflected in not just in human life. To with a basic attitude of praise long way towards moderating our exploitative instincts and tion to the earth Third, responsibility. The this lies in the notion of In the rush to blame all dualisms separations of God and World, of sons and nature, of economics passion) for our current dilemmas, let us not dismantle sense of self-transcendence, with and its tragedies, which is also human experience. We are one with life, but also self-consciously the flow of all life. This is our responsibility for how the earth is treated, how we think of our place in it, and how we should ingly. A hurting world deserves being

creation ex nihilo is undergoing major re-evaluation. The extension of creation backwards in time and sideways in space appropriates that human consciousness is part of a story which we have hardly begun to comprehend. A belief in creation, any- some supway, was always more about an intuition of superiority in a hierarchy. that the world is not its own explanation, and that we are part of something much larger than we might imagine, as it was about a beginning point in mutuality, time. That 'larger' is underlined now responsibility by the sense of interconnectedness of human which climate change has made us dramatically aware. The theme of the whole created order giving praise to God is a

listened to and climate change is for recognition. Would it be too to call up compassion as our appropriate ethical response to itself? Stewardship entails much more than simply 'managing' from a posed point of Both garden (basis of life) (flourishing of life) deserve a balanced view of responding to change. The 3-fold cord of interconnectedness and will surely be part of any new future which may emerge from the ing transformations brought climate change.

INTERRELIGIOUS Insight | 59 Reflections on Climate Change

A Jewish Response ancient rabbis had a phrase:
 "We are partners with God in the work of creation, in Tikkun Olam, the preservation and repair and perfecting of this our world. We are seeking the all resources of the spirit earthly habitation. The massive destruction of forests in Thailand, in Brazil, in the American Pacific Northwest, the in our confrontation forests which both absorb CO2 and produce oxygen, the killing of the forests in a chaos-monster of

Colorado by invasive beetles, the melt-
Jewish Star; photo, our own making,
ing of glaciers and the polar ice caps,
Cetta Kenney which has been tipthe loss of many species are all part
and
ping our earthly home into a possible
parcel of the effects of climate change.
downward spiral of potentially inexo-
The threat to this beautiful earth is so
rable deterioration.
great as to require nothing less than the
We turn to an ancient parable:
response of multitudes of the children of
“God says to Adam (“Humankind”): ‘I
Adam, humankind, world-wide.
have made many worlds before this one.
The first century Palestinian sage,
This one is especially good and beauti-
Rabbi Joshua the son of Hananiah proful. Take care to protect it and preserve
vides another parable which compleit because, if, through you, it comes to
ments the first: “Two men are in a boat
ruin, there is no one to repair it after
out on high waters. One begins drilling
you. And besides, you will be responsia hole in his side of the boat. The
other,
ble for the passing of many, many thoufrightened, remonstrates: ‘What in the
sands of my creatures. (Kohelet Rabbah
world are you doing!?’ the other answers
on Eccles. 7.14). “”
bluntly: ‘This is my side of the boat!’”
This homily-nugget is found in an
Our society is captive to a privatis-
8th century CE collection of sermons
tic hyper-individuality, each person out
on verses from Ecclesiastes. In this case
for himself, for his own personal gain,
the verse is: “Who can (is to) repair that
with an accompanying atrophy of “the
which has been distorted?”
sense of the other”. An oil refinery, for
Some say that climate change is
example, dumping toxic effluents into a
either not taking place or, if it is, it is
Great Lake claims “this is my side of the
an aspect of nature’s cycles with which
lake. I own this property.” But we are
human activity has nothing to do.

in the same boat and ancient Scriptures
Science disagrees with this viewpoint.
says that the earth is the Lord's and
Just as in the parable, the vast majority
the fullness thereof... You are merely
of scientists in the world tell us that we
sojourners on it." The earth is not just a
must accept responsibility and account resource for private gain or a dump for
ability for climate change and thus, the
private refuse.
well being and healing of nature. The
And this brings us to the third

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Sachin Nandha

and last archetypal story: Moses on the mountain receives the moral law. But
Nandha
down below the people are worshipping
the Golden Calf. When we look to find
the source-causes of climate change, we
often find the worship of the Golden
The Vedic
traditions
of Hinduism
Calf, the greed for material gain. And
offer imagery
everywhere we find opposition to plans
that values the
or programs or laws which mitigate the
power of the
negative affects of climate change again
Hindu Om; photo Cetta Kenney
natural world.
we often find the Golden Calf. Or we
Scholars of the
find the ignorance or misinformation
Vedas have held forth various texts and
promoted by worshipers of the Golden
rituals that extol the earth (bhu), the
Calf.
atmosphere (bhuvah), and sky (sva), as
Science and technology give us the
well as the goddess associated with the
tools needed to stop climate change and
earth (Prthivi), and the gods associated with water (Ap), with fire and heat

A Hindu response
Sachin

need is a spiritually ethically based consciousness and values to build a world noted that the centrality of these gods wide coalition of energy and will to put and goddesses suggests an underlying those scientific tools to use.

ecological sensitivity within the Hindu

On the Jewish High Holiday of the tradition. In later Indian thought, these New Year which celebrates the creation Vedic concepts become formalized into of the world, we are given a metaphor.

the Samkhya denotation of five great Imagine a large scale of balances; on one

elements (mahabhuta): earth (prthivi),

side are put all the single good deeds

water (jal), fire (tejas), air (vayu), and

of all of humans and on the other side

space (akasa). The meditative and ritual

of the scale, all the destructive deeds

processes of Hinduism entail aware of all human beings. One deed of one

ness of these constituents of material person can tip the scale to one side or

ity. Daily worship (puja) employs and

the other. The well being of the world is

evokes these five powers.

in the balance. Every life preserving act

Hinduism has long revered the tree.

we do counts for the perfecting of cre-

Early seals from the Indus Valley cities

ation. Whatever wasteful, destructive or

(c. 3000 BCE) depict the tree as a powheedless act can tip the scales of

climate

erful symbol of abundance. References

change to more destruction.

to India's trees can be found in a wide

The Prophet Isaiah put it: "Not for

range of literature, particularly in epic

chaos, destruction, did God create the

and poetic texts. India has a long history

world. For habitation God formed it!

of forest protection, from the edicts of

(Isaiah 45.18)."

Asoka, to the individual work of various

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Reflections on Climate Change

Rajas, to the modern Chipko move-

the body and the vitality of the

senses.

ment, wherein women have staved off Other spiritual paths advocate
renunforest destruction by surrounding trees ciation of all sensual
attachments to the
with their own bodies. world. However, even within the
paths
Rivers have been and continue to that relegate worldly concerns to a
status
be an integral part of Hindu religious of secondary importance, the
doctrine
practice. More than fifty Vedic hymns of Dharma emphasizes a need to act
praise the Sarasvati, a river (now dry) “for the sake of the good of the
world”.
associated with the goddess of learning Particularly in regard to such
issues as
and culture. The Ganges River which the building of dams in the
Narmada
flows through northern India likewise is River Valley, this requires taking
into
referred to as a goddess originating from account social ecology or the need
to
the top of Siva’s head in the Himalaya integrate environmental policy
with the
Mountains, giving sustenance to hun- daily needs of tribal and other
marginaldreds of millions of modern Indians. ized peoples.
Traditionally, the rivers of India have The current worldwide
ecological
always been considered pure. Modern crisis has come to our attention
during
industrial contaminants and human the past four decades and its
effects have
wastes have fouled the rivers, though been felt within South Asia more
recent-
Ganges water still plays an important ly. As the region copes with
decreasing
role in India’s ritual life. air quality in its cities and
degraded
Hinduism offers a variety of cosmo- water in various regions, religious
thinklogical views which may or may not situ- ers and activists have begun
to reflect on
ate the human in the natural world in how the broader values of Hindu
tradian ecologically friendly manner. On the tion might contribute to
fostering greatone hand, the agrarian and often near- er care for the
earth. Gandhi’s advocacy
wilderness images of India found in the of simple living through the
principles
Vedas, Upanisads, and epic texts present of nonviolence (ahimsa) and

holding a style of life seemingly in tune with the elements. The Samkhya and Tantra traditions affirm the reality and efficacy of the physical world. On the other hand, the Advaita Vedanta tradition asserts that the highest truth involves a vision of oneness that transcends nature and self-sustaining in a sense, dismisses the significance of the material world by referring to it as illusion or maya. One model of Hindu spirituality encourages physicality through yoga practices that enhance the health of the five

to truthfulness (satyagraha) could give some Hindus pause as they consider lifestyle changes engendered by temporary consumerism. Most of the Hindu population lives within villages that, barring natural disasters such as flood or drought, are self-sustaining and use resources sparingly. However, as the population of South Asia increases, and as the modern lifestyle continues to demand consumer goods, the balance of sustainability can shatter. With the population and acknowledgment of the five

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 Gursharan Thandi

great elements, with a new interpretation of social duty (dharma) expanded to include the ecological community, encourage and with remembrance of its ethic of co-operation and sharamistness, the Hindu tradition can develop new modalities for caring for the earth. Many According to Hindu religion, “dhanath dharma ucayate” – that which sustains all species of life and helps to maintain harmonious relationship human

Two of our fundamental beliefs are service to the community and equality between people, values which age a spirit of ing of resources equally. This is seen in our community kitchens which are maintained by voluntary service. farmers in the Punjab grow their crops organically because they feel earth must be respected and Water is a primary link between

among them is dharma. That which disturbs such ecology is adharma. Hence communities we can say: around the world celebrated the inauguration of “The Cycle of Creation”. As the unwise act attached to Sikhism follows three hundred year action, Bharata, cycles – the most recent of which ended so the wise should act unattached, in 1999. In 1699, a time of terrible perintending to maintain the world ... secution of the Sikhs, the coming cycle was named “The Cycle of the Sword”. The three hundred years that followed A Sikh response were certainly dominated by armed Gursharan Thandi struggles. But the Cycle of creation, which we have just entered, has already

A s Sikhs, our ties to led to dramatic changes in environmental practices by Sikh Gurudwaras. Sikh Symbol; original Art

the environ- It has also led to a launch of a new Swami Tapasananda

ment around initiative called EcoSikh. This is the us is very Sikh community’s contribution to the important and, United Nations Alliance of Religions in a sense, it is and Conservation (UNARC) Seven Year spiritual. The Plan project, whose aim is to help histories of our Gurus tell us tales of the the world’s major religions create long places where they sat in meditation, in term plans to improve their relationdeep forests and high upon mountains ship with the environment. The plans, and beside rivers. There is something in which each tradition celebrates its magical and transcendent about praying unique relationship with the environin nature’s spaces – the connection and ment and puts its teachings on ecolthe feeling of oneness is very apparent – ogy into action, were launched at a a life that suggests mastery over oneself major event at Windsor Castle, UK, rather than over nature. in November 2009, and were used to

inform the UN Framework Convention to on Climate Change in Copenhagen the better following month. The EcoSikh Five Year Plan is a his- contoric decision of commitment by Sikh – for communities around the world to make work our children’s future greener. It contains principles many far-reaching ideas for improving understanding, and eco practices at different levels – indi- share and viduals, Gurudwars and links with the wider community. For example, the create fact that all Gurudwaras run a langar (communal kitchen) involves them in of our the production of food on a massive barrenness scale. If the whole system of sourcing, reflect purchasing, preparation and cooking The became a self-consciously green process lies in this would make a substantial difference around to the way energy was being used. And eco-theology such self-conscious attention to detail

would make a wonderful statement wider society that changes for the can be made. The Eco Sikh Five Year Plan tains many ambitious proposals instance, for mass educational around the world on how eco are reflected in Sikh for twinning projects to help embody best practices. Sikhism teaches us that we the environment around us and that our surroundings are a reflection inner state. The increasing and the desolation of our planet a spiritual emptiness within us. solution, according to our Gurus, prayer and caring for the world us – the very principles of laid down by Guru Nanak Devji.