



# Society for Conservation Biology

## RELIGION AND CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

### Working Group

<http://www.conbio.org/workinggroups/Religion/>

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## Christianity and Conservation Fact Sheet

### Religion and background

Christianity derives its name from the Greek word 'Christ', which means the Anointed One. Christians believe this was Jesus, the Son of God. There are approximately 2 billion Christians in the world today, most of them falling under three main traditions: the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, and the Protestant churches. Several smaller Christian groups exist independent of these traditions.

### Religion in relation to environment

Christianity teaches that all of creation is the loving action of God, who continues to care for creation in all aspects of its existence. In the Gospel of Luke (12:6-7), Jesus says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God," emphasizing God's care and concern for all creatures. God also pronounced the creation "good" in the opening passages of the Bible.

The creation account in the book of Genesis is explicit about humanity's special role within creation. While some earlier interpretations of this role emphasized mastery over nature, recent interpretations stress humanity's responsibility to care for the natural world as stewards. The main Christian churches have sought in various ways to reexamine their teachings and practices in the light of environmental crisis. Christians are called to have a greater respect and appreciation for nature and to be God's stewards, protecting and conserving the natural world.

*"Christians, in particular realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty toward nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith."* –Pope John Paul II, 1990 New Year message.

*"For the human family, this home is the earth, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility. We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion. ... Humanity today is rightly concerned about the ecological balance of tomorrow. It is important for assessments in this regard to be carried out prudently, in dialogue with experts and people of wisdom, uninhibited by ideological pressure to draw hasty conclusions, and above all with the aim of reaching agreement on a model of sustainable development capable of ensuring the well-being of all while respecting environmental balances."* - Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Address, 2008

*"We will resist the claim that anything in creation is merely a resource for human exploitation. We will resist species extinction for human benefit; consumerism and harmful mass production; pollution of land, air and waters; all human activities which are now leading to probable rapid climate change; and the policies and plans which contribute to the disintegration of creation".* -- World Council of Churches; Ten Affirmations on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation; Seoul; 1990

*"We must attempt to return to a proper relationship with the Creator AND the creation. This may well mean that just as a shepherd will in times of greatest hazard, lay down his life for his flock, so human beings may need to forego part of their wants and needs in order that the survival of the natural world can be assured."* – Ecumenical Patriarchate, Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis, 1990



### Examples of religious leaders in conservation

- Evangelical Environmental Network <<http://www.creationcare.org/>>
- European Christian Environmental Network <<http://www.ecen.org/>>
- A Rocha, <<http://www.arocha.org/int-en/index.html>>
- Patriarch Bartholomew, <<http://www.ec-patr.org/>>
- Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams <<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/127>>

### Examples of conservation projects aided by religion

- On Lembata Island, Indonesia, WWF-Indonesia has worked with the Catholic Church to limit the number of whales hunted by the local community and to find alternative livelihoods for the community. <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=170>
- In England, the Salisbury Cathedral installed a new eco-friendly lighting system to mark their 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article3572865.ece>
- In Papua New Guinea, pastors from the Evangelical Alliance of PNG led a rubbish collection movement in the town of Goroka, spreading the message of environmental awareness in the streets. <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=178>

For more information, see Alliance of Religions and Conservation ([www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)) and the Forum on Religion and Ecology (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/main.html>)

