

Religious Quotations on Environmental Responsibility

Islam

Assuredly the creation
of the heavens
And the earth
Is greater
Than the creation of humankind;
Yet most people understand not.

- *Koran* (as quoted in *This Sacred Earth*, edited by Roger Gottlieb)

For the Muslim, mankind's role on earth is that of *khalifa*, vice-regent or trustee of God. We are God's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping. Our function as vice-regent, *khalifa* of God, is only to oversee the trust. The *khalifa* is answerable for his/her actions; for the way in which he/ she uses or abuses the trust of God. . . .

It is these values which led Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, to say: 'Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded,' and 'If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field and men and beasts and birds eat from it, all of it is charity on his part,' and again, 'The world is green and beautiful and God appointed you his stewards over it'; environment consciousness is born when such values are adopted and become an intrinsic part of our mental and physical make up.

- Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasserf, from "The Muslim Declaration on Nature"

Hinduism

Earth, in which lie the sea, the rivers and other waters,
in which food and cornfields have come to be,
in which lives all that breathes and that moves,
May she confer on us the finest of her yield.

Earth, in which the waters, common to all,
moving on all sides, flow unflinching, day and night,
may she pour on us milk in many streams,
and endow us with lustre.

May those born of thee, O Earth,
be for our welfare, free from sickness and waste.
Wakeful through a long life, we shall become
bearers of tribute to thee.
Earth, my mother, set me securely with bliss
in full accord with heaven,
O wise one,
uphold me in grace and splendour.

- from the "Hymn to Earth" in the Atharva Veda (as quoted by Dr. Karan Singh)

Fire is his head, his eyes are the moon and the sun;
the regions of space are his ears, his voice the revealed Veda;
the wind is his breath, his heart is the entire universe;
the earth is his footstool, truly he is the inner soul of all.
- from the “Mundaka Upanishad” (as quoted by Dr. Karan Singh)

Judaism

Man may not taste anything until he has recited a blessing, as it was written ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’ (Psalm 24:1). Anyone who derives benefit from this world without a (prior) blessing is guilty of misappropriating sacred property.
- from *Tosefta, Berakhot*, 4:1 (as quoted in *Religion and Environmental Crisis*)

Christianity

At the founding ceremony of the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches, M.L. Daneel gave the following exposition:
“Our mandate derives from our faith that we belong to the body of Christ. As members of that body we are not only commanded to build unity among ourselves as Christian churches, but to build new relationships with the entire creation in an attempt to avoid destruction and preserve life for all creatures. I say this because the body of Christ is more than the church . . . In him all things hold together, in him all things are created. That makes him the true guardian of the land (*muridzi venyika*), the great guardian of all creation. Read together with Matthew 28:18, where Jesus claims all authority in heaven and on earth, we take this twofold interpretation of Christ’s body to mean that his presence and power pervade all creation . . . The implication is that when we as Christians partake of holy communion we express our unity in the body of Christ, that is the church. At the same time we reaffirm our responsibility for the body of Christ, in the sense of its presence in all creation. The sacrament therefore makes us earthkeepers, stewards of creation . . .”
- from “African Independent Churches Face the Challenge of Environmental Ethics” by M.L. Daneel

I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator.
- St. Basil the Great (as quoted in *Caring for Creation* by Anne Rowthorn)

He, therefore who is not illumined by such great splendour of created things is blind; he who is not awakened by such great clamour is deaf; he who does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; he who does not note the first principle from such great signs is foolish. Open your eyes, therefore, prick up your spiritual ears, open your lips and apply your heart, that you may see our God in All creatures.
- St. Bonaventure, “The Mind’s Road to God” (as quoted in *God’s World* by Ken Gnanakan)