



WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SERIES

CONSERVATION, VALUES AND RELIGION

Tuesday, 8 June 2010

The Meeting Rooms, The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY

Chair: Susanna Paisley, Director of Development, DICE, University of Kent

The importance of values and religion to conservation may be lost on many people (except for perhaps an acknowledgement of nature-friendly indigenous values). Yet, when it comes to practical on-the-ground conservation engagement and leveraging major behavioural shifts, the importance of values and religion is paramount. The eleven major faiths have incomparable influence when it comes to changing behaviour amongst their adherents who represent about 85% of the global population and own 7% of the Earth's habitable surface. Certainly, these faiths pre-date post-Copernican scientific understanding; however, all contain at least the seeds of an environmental ethic.

A shift is under way from seeing humanity as set apart from nature to inextricably interconnected with it: the so-called 'greening-of-religions'. This event will focus on the practical conservation benefits of engagement with faith-group partners.

Islam and conservation in Sumatra

Prof Stuart Harrop, Director of DICE and Project Leader of the Darwin Initiative project: Integrating religion within conservation: Islamic beliefs and Sumatran forest management

Within secular conceptual language: ecosystem services are essential for human well being and life on earth. However, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment states that nearly two-thirds of these services are under threat, with watershed-related services being the most urgent national level priority. Indonesia contains 10% of the world's remaining tropical rainforest. These forests provide crucial "services" for the international and national community in the form of carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation and for rural communities in the form of watershed management. Yet, high deforestation rates in Indonesia, particularly Sumatra, highlight the need to promote and facilitate sustainable natural resource management to ensure ongoing benefits from these life-supporting forests. Indonesia also has the world's largest Muslim population (88% of its 245,500,000 population follows Islam). Religion has a strong influence on daily life and within Islam there are several key principles (*Tauhid, Khalifah, Mizan and Fitrah*) written in the *Al-Qur'an* that underpin nature conservation and outline the human role in conserving natural resources. Through a Darwin Initiative funded project, the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology and its partners is finding ways to fully integrate Islam and local beliefs and traditional practices in order to curb the tide of forest and ecosystem destruction.

Islamic environmentalism

Fazlun Khalid, Founder, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences

Christianity and conservation

Simon N. Stuart, Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission

Contrary to much perceived wisdom, the Christian duty of care for God's creation is deeply rooted in the Bible. In recent decades we have witnessed a rediscovery of this biblical mandate, especially among evangelical groups and churches. This growing movement seems to have arisen simultaneously in many parts of the world, including in regions where Christianity is the dominant religion (such as the United States and parts of Africa), and countries where it is a small minority (such as Lebanon and India). The worldwide growth in Christian commitment to conservation is exemplified in the A Rocha family of organisations, now active in 18 countries on all continents, with emerging groups in several other countries.

Christian groups working on conservation have taken many forms. Some, such as the Evangelical Environmental Network, have focused on raising awareness within churches. Others, such as the Evangelical Climate Initiative, are involved in lobbying for political changes. The John Ray Initiative is a Christian Think Tank on environmental issues, and supplies theological and scientific resources to help Christians work through complex current issues. A Rocha's focus is implementing practical field projects on the ground, often in a community setting through residential field centres, and seeking to collaborate with non-Christian groups on specific activities.

Although it is early days, there have been some notable successes as a result of explicit Christian involvement in conservation. Examples include lobbying for the re-authorization of the US Endangered Species Act, and softening the stance of the political right on climate change. Right now, Christian groups are spear-heading the fight to save the Alvor Estuary in Portugal from touristic development, and the Dakatcha Woodlands in Kenya from inappropriate biofuel development.

Yin and yang: the Daoist balancing of nature

Martin Palmer, Secretary General, Alliance of Religions and Conservation

"I have Three Treasures, which I hold fast and watch over closely: the first is kindness, the second is simple living and the third is not to presume oneself to be the chief of the whole world." Daoist sage, Laozi, Chapter 67 of "*Dao De Jing*"

The landscape of China is one of vast cities, small villages, great rivers, and long stretches of sacred mountains towering above them all. From the majesty of Hua Shan to the more humble but equally sacred peaks of Taibaishan, the power of ancient sacred mountains continues to infuse the Chinese environment even today.

In July 2006, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation assisted in the launch of the first ecological Daoist temple in China, at Taibaishan, built in partnership with the China Daoist Association and the local government. This temple, and the workshops that the Daoists have arranged there, have transformed into an astonishing movement throughout China, in which all 1,500 Daoist temples, big and small, are looking at what they intend to do to protect the environment, through enacting an Eight Year Plan of Daoist Ecological action.

The Plan includes environmental management of land and buildings, environmental teaching, and prohibiting the use of endangered animals and plants in any Daoist food and medicine. Daoist principles are behind many TCM practices. Link to www.arcworld.org for more details of the Daoist plans, and plans from the other major religions.