



sierra magazine

How can religion protect the planet?

Organized religions have already made strong statements about our obligation to be stewards of the earth. However, much more can be done. Religious leaders need to enter the public arena and declare that despoiling wilderness and polluting the planet are not simply mistaken policies but profound moral failings and, ultimately, desecrations of something holy. They need to scrutinize the environmental actions of the corporations in which church funds are invested and the ecological track records of the typically rich and powerful lay leaders of religious organizations.

Every church, synagogue, mosque, and temple should be a model of energy efficiency and recycling, use environmentally safe products, and raise awareness of environmental-justice issues. Finally, religious teachers of all kinds can help us realize that an authentic spiritual life must include resistance to ignorant, shortsighted, and unjust poisoning of our world.

Roger Gottlieb, professor of philosophy, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and author of the forthcoming A Spirituality of Resistance

Nature, be it the trees or the stars, is a gift from Allah to humanity. Those who follow Islam believe that the destruction of nature, whether quick and immediate like slash-and-burn agricultural practices or gradual, such as the destruction of the ozone layer, is a rejection of God and faith. That simple philosophy should make it clear that consideration for God's gift must underlie all that we do. Not protecting the planet is irreligious.

Atif Harden, executive director, American Muslim Council

We are called to care for creation by the first and great commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God . . . and love your neighbor as yourself." God's purpose for us is to love and to live in harmony with all that He made. All of Creation and all generations to come are our neighbors. As we take His word to heart, we are assuming a leadership role in the healing of our planet by putting our church on an energy diet. We invite all people of faith to join with us in cutting greenhouse-gas emissions by investing in energy efficiency and by buying renewable resources generated from God's gifts, the wind and the sun.

The Reverend Sally G. Bingham, chair, Diocesan Commission for the Environment, Episcopal Church of the United States

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America urges its members to combine stewardship with social justice. For example, the garden we planted on the seventh floor of our Chicago garage provides fruits and vegetables to food pantries. We also encourage the practice of an "environmental tithe" by which our members can reduce their consumption by 10 percent. Martin Luther once wrote, "In a mouse we admire God's creation and craft work. The same may be said about flies." We call upon our members to read the Scriptures to discover and act on earth-keeping principles.

Job S. Ebenezer, director, Environmental Stewardship and Hunger Education, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

To recognize the unity of all being, and to look at the world and each other from the standpoint of awe and wonder and radical amazement (and not just from the standpoint of what we can get out of it) is the essence of Jewish spirituality, and the central goal of the weekly spiritual meditative practice we call Shabbat. Yet this observance will continue to be relegated to the weekends until we develop a politics of meaning that demands a "new bottom line" defining productivity and efficiency not by how much money an institution accumulates but by how much it increases our capacity to be ethically, spiritually, and ecologically sensitive.

To that end we need a social responsibility amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Only corporations that could prove a history of social and environmental responsibility (as measured by an ethical impact report) could receive a charter. Every 20 years, community organizations monitoring the environmental and other consequences of corporate products and marketing would determine the charter's eligibility for renewal.

Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of Tikkun and author of The Politics of Meaning