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Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

HB: 9781843711384

PB: 9781847062734

Public Religion and the Urban Environment

HB: 9781441103574

PB: 9781472534651

Religion in Environmental and Climate Change

HB: 9781441169297

PB: 9781472505569

The Sacred in the City

HB: 9781441172952

PB: 9781472526052

# Religions and Environments

A reader in religion,  
nature and ecology

**RICHARD BOHANNON**

**B L O O M S B U R Y**  
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

**Bloomsbury Academic**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square	1385 Broadway
London	New York
WC1B 3DP	NY 10018
UK	USA

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)

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First published 2014

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-78093-762-5

ISBN: PB: 978-1-78093-802-8

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

*For*  
*Otto Maduro*  
*(1945–2013)*

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come together to help build each other's barns and other structures. The Lighthouse community's Green Mosque sets an example for all of us. They are following the Green Deen principles of being just toward the Earth (*adl*) and maintaining balance (*mizan*) by spreading responsibility across all community members.

Maintaining a Green Mosque requires constant effort. Imagine your local mosque. How much plastic do you think is wasted during Ramadan? How much trash is generated after each meal? Maybe some of these fundamental data points need to be gathered as an initial step to make sure that your mosque community has a quantitative baseline to start from. Then when you take the steps that the Lighthouse Mosque has taken, you can use them to measure your mosque's progress. Eventually, when mosques across the world begin implementing the simple steps taken by the Lighthouse Mosque, green practices will become part of the greater Islamic community everywhere.

## Environmental and eco-justice

9

### ***Religion and environmental justice,*** **Laurel Kearns (2012)**

**L** aurel Kearns is an associate professor of Sociology and Religion and Environmental Studies at Drew University, and has done extensive research on religious environmental activism. This essay provides an overview of how religion has intersected with the environmental justice and eco-justice movements.

"Who dies first? Who is sacrificed first?" Lutheran theologian Christoph Stueckelberger's (2009) haunting chapter title in *God, Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and Ethical Perspectives* conveys the centrality of justice issues in religious responses to climate change, as he pushes Christians to wrestle with the current stalemate of the climate crisis. These are not hypothetical questions, he argues, but rather the questions that are implicitly being decided with every delay in global climate change treaties and action. In other words, inaction equals injustice. We do not want to face the questions he raises, because we do not want to admit that not acting is unjust. We are too used to seeing justice as decisions about actions, as in Stueckelberger's definition of justice: fair and just distribution of opportunities, responsibilities, and burdens. This points to the other difficult questions that lead to this inaction: Who pays, and in what ways, for proposed solutions? Who sacrifices what? Who will act first? Stueckelberger points to the issues of justice in how all these questions are answered:

the basic ethical question confronting us today is how to distribute the limited resources between three areas – prevention, mitigation and adaptation – in order to minimize the number of victims. Climate change has become a question of global climate justice. (Stueckelberger, 2009: 48)

To begin to address these issues, he points to 14 dimensions of climate justice, some in tension with others, that make it so difficult: capability-, performance-, and needs-related

justice; distributive, participatory, procedural, functional, and punitive justice; as well as transitional, restorative, transformative, and intergenerational justice (Stueckelberger, 2009: 49–51). What also makes it difficult is the enormity of the situation, for climate change affects everyone.

Obviously, there is not room in one chapter to discuss all these aspects. What I do hope to do is to give the reader a sense of how religion, justice, and environmental concerns come together in the concept of eco-justice and environmental justice. To do so, I will primarily refer to Christian efforts, as the conversation concerning environmental issues is now decades strong and has been the center of my research. But I will also try to show how other religious traditions embrace environmental concerns, for religious environmentalism is often characterized by interfaith efforts.

### ***The centrality of justice***

Because of the enormity of the justice issues involved in responding to climate change and other environmental issues, and the difficulty of making decisions regarding the mitigation of climate change, religious groups have been involved since early on in helping to frame the conversation. Religious and activist organizations are worried that the justice concerns of those with the political clout are being ignored, while scientific issues and the economic interests of the U.S., Europe, Russia, China, and India dominate the conversation. Rabbi Warren Stone, representing North American Jewish organizations, articulated why scores of religious groups would be present at the failed 2009 climate change talks in Copenhagen:

We are called by our religious traditions to serve as a bold voice for justice. Climate change will have a dramatic impact on hundreds of millions of the poorest people on our planet, especially those who live in coastal areas. (National Religious Coalition on Creation Care, 2009)

Religious groups staged actions, organized marches, held services, and lighted candles to highlight the importance of the Copenhagen meeting and, most importantly, they went to Copenhagen to add their voices to the conversation.

Although the justice dimensions of climate change may seem obvious once you think about it, most people are not used to thinking about the justice dimensions of environmental issues. And, despite decades of religious involvement in the environmental movement, many commentators are still surprised that people of faith are involved in environmentalism. One of the chief motivations for many of these is the centrality of justice issues, the main topic of this chapter. From a religious perspective, all environmental issues have a moral aspect, but we are used to thinking about them in scientific and technocratic terms: What is the problem? Can it be fixed, and how? Scientists recognized this dimension, and in January 1990, 34 internationally renowned scientists, including Carl Sagan, sent an "Open Letter to

the Religious Community," stating that "Problems of such magnitude and solutions demanding so broad a perspective must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension."

One response to this has been to recover the sense of sacredness and intrinsic worth in the "creation" as a primary motivation for environmental concern. So the centrality of justice may come as a surprise to some who think that religious environmentalism is mainly a type of nature spirituality filled with tree huggers, star gazers, outdoor recreationists, and "pagans," who are accused of romanticizing nature (Taylor, 2002). It is certainly true that feelings of awe, inspiration, reverence, and the sacred in nature infuse and motivate many of those involved in religious environmentalism. The shared sense of the sacred worth of the planet and all its inhabitants has indeed made religious environmentalism a primary vehicle of interfaith work. For example, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, stemming from a gathering of world faiths in 1985 in Assisi, Italy, works with 11 faith traditions on a range of environmental issues.

But just as much, those involved are motivated by justice concerns, because justice is a central motif of most religious traditions, and because the justice dimensions of environmental issues resonate within and across religious traditions. The Joint Appeal, as the letter from scientists came to be known, led in the early 1990s to the creation of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, formed between evangelical Christians, Jews, Roman Catholics, Christian Orthodox, and mainline Protestants in the United States. It was the justice issues of climate change that made it the environmental problem that they all readily agreed was the priority (Kearns, 2011). Theological (and political) differences meant that other topics, for instance those concerning population, did not foster the same priority and agreement. Later, a similar interfaith coalition effort would center on protecting endangered species, and the issues of justice, such as the right to exist and thrive due to the sacred worth of all species. However, as we shall see, issues concerning animals and eco-systems are not always included in environmental justice concerns.

It is not hard to understand why issues of justice are central to a range of ecological crises facing us: species extinction, growing toxicity and hazardous wastes climate change and the resulting unstable changing weather patterns, environmental degradation, pollution, deforestation, salinization of land and desertification. As we become more aware of the interconnectedness of planetary systems, we become aware of the repercussions of their disruption. These result in severe food shortages, drought and flooding, loss of livelihoods and fertile lands, loss of homelands (even whole countries as island nations such as Tuvalu or the Maldives are looking for other countries to accept their people since their future habitability is bleak with any rise of ocean levels), forced migrations, increased impoverishment, environmental health risks, and the resulting conflicts over land, food, and water, so that environmental refugees are on the rise globally. Hence environmentalism connects with issues of justice such as poverty and hunger, increasing economic disparity due to economic globalization, wars over resources (such as oil, coal, and water), world health. Since women, children, the poor, and people of

color often pay the biggest price for environmental degradation, environmentalism also links up with movements concerning women and children, reproductive health, racism, postcolonialism, and indigenous rights. Not only does this focus on justice enable religious environmentalism to intersect with other social movements, but the focus on justice provides a clear authoritative religious mandate for work that often is deemed suspect within some Christian, Jewish, and other religious circles because of "pagan" overtones and fear of "worshiping the creation," and within other religious circles as less important than issues of religious persecution, poverty, personal moral values, and competing group priorities.

Central to an understanding of environmentalism, and the science of ecology, is the interconnectedness of all life forms. When some people or species bear the burden of environmental degradation disproportionately, then justice is at stake. So environmentalism is a major carrier of global connectedness, crossing religious, racial, ethnic, gender species, economic, political, and geographical boundaries, emphasizing that what happens in one place affects those far away – the consumption habits of the more industrialized and wealthy countries destroy habitat and cultures in the rest of the globe, and the pollution and waste generated in one place adversely affect those located far from the site of generation.

From a religious perspective, as the issues above clearly demonstrate, concern for right or just relations between humans is often central. For example, in the religions of the "Book," or the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, issues of justice fill the pages of their scriptures, from the Hebrew scriptures' concern for Sabbath rest, debt relief, and the care of the widow, to Jesus's concern for "the least of these" and the treatment of "others" such as Samaritans, to the Prophet Muhammad's declaration that "Allah enjoineeth justice and kindness" (Surah 16:90) and the core Muslim principle of *sadaqa*, understood as bearing one another's burdens. The well-known Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings are filled with references to justice, including the admonition of the eleventh principle of "right livelihood," which calls Buddhists to be "aware that great violence and injustice have been done to our environment and society, we are committed not to live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature" (Hanh, 2003: 453). One has only to think about Gandhi to recognize the basis in Hinduism for concerns for justice. While these are only brief mentions. These religious references also illustrate the tensions present within religious environmentalism: How large is the concept of justice? Does it include all of "creation" or are humans privileged and the rest of creation put there for human use?

To include other-than-humankind in issues religious conceptions of justice, one must first prove their religious importance and worth, as many argue that their religious traditions legitimate a more utilitarian (in religious language, dominion) perspective that animals and natural resources have value because of their use to humans. Going back again to central texts, Christian and Jewish environmentalists start with the message conveyed in the opening lines of Genesis – from the length and care for creation before humans arrive on the scene (the majority of the first story), to the fact that God pronounced it as very good, to what some call the eleventh commandment, "To till and

keep the earth" (Genesis 2:15). Further, they remind us, the biblical mandates for the Sabbath rest laws include the just treatment of animals and rest even for the land. All three religions affirm notions of the intrinsic worth of all the creation (the Psalms and the Qur'an tell us that all creation sings praises, and in Noah, the covenant after the flood is with all of creation), independent of any utilitarian value to humans. Thus, many religious and secular environmental ethicists expand the notion of human rights to that of biotic rights – the right of all living things to a healthy ecosystem and a fair chance to thrive. They do this with the concept of eco-justice, as the common understanding of environmental justice tends to have an anthropocentric focus, as explored below.

Thus, there are often tensions between interhuman justice concerns (an anthropocentric focus) and concerns for justice for all of the planet's inhabitants (a more bio-centric focus), because embracing a holistic eco-justice ethic involves difficult dilemmas of preserving species, habitats, and eco-systems, righting past injustice, and meeting an expanding human population's basic needs. These tensions were certainly present in the visioning, drafting and revisioning of the Earth Charter, an international, interfaith, grassroots up statement that seeks to give voice of a vision of eco-justice for the entire planet can be seen in the brief history of the development of eco-justice and environmental justice concerns in the United States, as explored below.

## History

As early as the 1970s, the World Council of Churches' (WCC) theme was a "Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society" that incorporated concern over the limits of and threats to the Earth's capacity to sustain current and future human life; in other words, a more utilitarian focus. Here, the justice framing is still primarily anthropocentric, yet that changed. The vision of justice is larger in the WCC theme of "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" (1983–1991). This theme made the linkage more clearly between the thriving of humans and the planet. Similarly, it was within the frame of justice that many Christians in the United States first incorporated environmental concerns, seeing environmental issues as related to issues of civil rights, toxics, farm workers, and economic justice with which they had been previously involved. The theology of eco-justice became a growing concern of much of mainline liberal Protestantism and Catholicism in the 1980s, although the language of environmental justice also was used often, and the two terms initially were more interchangeable. The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group (NCC EJWG) used the language of both, stating

"Environmental Justice" is a holistic term that includes all ministries designed to heal and defend creation. Eco-Justice is an even broader term that includes efforts to assure justice for all of creation and the human beings who live in it. (NCC EJWG, n.d.)

This statement reveals a very different understanding of environmental justice, seeing it as primarily concerned with nonhuman environmental issues, and it is worth

pausing a moment to understand how eco-justice and environmental justice came to be perceived as two distinct concepts, one more religious, one more secular, with an anthropocentric focus to environmental justice. In the process, a more detailed understanding of the range of justice issues in religious environmentalism will become clear.

### ***Environmental justice or eco-justice?***

Although most scholars (Gottlieb, 1993; Cole and Foster, 2001) trace the history of the US environmental justice movement to the 1982 Warren County, North Carolina protests (discussed below), the roots of what are now deemed environmental justice concerns within both environmentalism and US religious environmentalism can be found much earlier (Taylor, 2002). The first community effort to deal with lead paint issues, a toxicity problem that affects low-income people and people of color communities disproportionately, emerged as early as 1965. By the 1970s, dozens of groups were active, but saw themselves as part of the community empowerment movement with no connection to the environmental movement (Gottlieb, 1993: 246).

There were other factors at work that led to the lack of reception or fragmentation of the issues. As worries over the effect of pesticides on the biotic community grew as a result of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, leading to the banning of DDT, there was also concern over the pesticide exposure of migrant farm workers, now primarily forgotten. Anxiety over lead paint was shifted into disquiet over leaded gasoline and thus moved away from any particular social, community context. The latter tied in with concern over clean air, but as a hazard to all in general. Many of the connections between specific hazardous materials and affected groups were viewed as occupational health issues, but with little recognition that, increasingly, the majority of those who worked in high-risk, poorly regulated industries and jobs were people of color. Little or no attention was given to the communities where the industries resided or where their waste by-products were disposed. For a variety of reasons, including the whiteness of the main environmental movement, issues of environmental pollution as human justice issues did not become a main part of the growing environmental movement's concerns, but were seen as separate. During this same period, however, the movement of religious eco-justice was forming in an attempt to make these types of connections with environmental concerns. Further, many involved in civil rights were also making the connection. Indeed, influenced by the larger cultural climate of the civil rights and environmental movements, as early as 1970 the American Baptist Church was concerned that ecology and justice work had to be held together. In 1974, Presbyterian minister Bill Gibson, active in the civil rights movement, helped found the Eco-Justice Project at Cornell University (Gibson, 2004), which contributed to the development of the NCC Eco-Justice Working Group in 1984. The EJWG represented the cooperative efforts of the mainline, historical black, and orthodox denominations on the topic of eco-justice, under the guidance of a Director of Environmental Justice.

It was the 1982 Warren County, North Carolina campaign against the proposed placement of a PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) landfill that brought widespread attention in the United States on the connection between environmental toxicity and race and poverty. Those organizing the campaign began to suspect that the site had been chosen not for its environmental suitability but more for the expected nonresistance by its majority of African American residents, who were seen to be undereducated, unorganized, and in need of employment. Among the more than 500 protesters arrested during the struggle were several United Church of Christ (UCC) ministers, including the Reverends Benjamin Chavis and Charles Lee, who had helped to organize the campaign as part of their work with the UCC Commission for Racial Justice. As a result of this struggle, the NCC issued a statement in 1986 called "Toxic Pollution in Minority and Low-income Communities." A year later, in 1987, the UCC Commission issued the landmark study on *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* and, thanks to sustained publicity efforts, garnered a great deal of attention. The study (and two subsequent ones) looked for common factors in the placement of hazardous and toxic waste sites throughout the nation and concluded that race and low income were statistically significant factors in the placement of these sites (UCC, 1987). For instance, the study found that 60 percent of African Americans lived in communities with abandoned toxic-waste sites (UCC, 1987).<sup>1</sup> As a follow-up on their own report as well as the UCC report, the National Council of Churches and SWOP (Southwest Organizing Project) conducted public interdenominational hearings in the southwest in 1989 on "Toxic Pollution in Minority Communities" to gather further evidence and to draw attention to how little regard the major environmental organizations paid to issues in people of color communities, suggesting that it was reflective of their racial makeup (i.e., how white they were). All of this and other similar local grassroots activities aimed at fighting the tactics of polluting industries, as well as the indicting research and consciousness raising of sociologist Robert Bullard (*Dumping in Dixie* came out in 1990), led to the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, DC in October 1991, which significantly shaped what became known as the environmental justice movement.

The NCC EJWG, whether because it was primarily white and not as grassroots in makeup, or because it was explicitly Christian, was not invited to help plan the Summit. The explanation to one member – that "we don't want Christ preached" – is indicative of an artificial divide that continues to exist. (Many environmental justice scholars and activist organizations still primarily leave out participation by religious groups and religious motivations.<sup>2</sup>) The Summit was extremely important: 300 of the more than 650 people in attendance were delegates from primarily grassroots groups, who discovered the shared patterns to their problems and formed important networks of information and support. What was equally significant was the ratification of the "principles of environmental justice," which display a wide understanding of environmental justice: *procedural justice* through an unbiased public policy in deciding on land use, protection from hazardous/toxic wastes and nuclear testing, a safe workplace with no hazardous exposure, and the cessation of production of hazardous and toxic materials; as well as *restorative justice*



in the cleanup of existing polluted sites, and the provision of healthcare and redress for those already exposed (People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991). Other principles, less evident at first but equally essential, included aspects of *participatory justice*, such as self-determination and participation in decision making, consent to all medical procedures, freedom from experimental testing on subject/dependant peoples, and the end of military occupation and exploitation, plus recognition of the special status of native/first peoples. The principles end with recognition of the intergenerational and interspecies ethical demands from the planet and future generations on our current consumptive habits.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the first principle "affirms the sacredness of the Earth" and perhaps gives one clue to why organizers did not want Christ preached: much of Christianity has not been known to recognize the sacredness of the Earth, and has historically persecuted those who do, labeling them as pagans, including some co-religionists who are seen to "worship the creation, and not the Creator" if they are involved in environmentalism. For many present, Christianity was part of the problem.

Further, despite the larger biotic vision of environmental justice, articulated in the first and third principles that affirm "the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the *interdependence of all species*, and the right to be free from ecological destruction" as well as "the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a *sustainable planet for humans and other living things*," the environmental justice movement came to be seen as secular and anthropocentric, in part as a result of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Following the 1991 Summit, the EPA met with the organizers and established an Office of Environmental Equity. Activists responded that they did not want equity, or to be treated the same as everyone else (procedural justice), but rather justice as spelled out in the Principles of Environmental Justice. By Earth Day 1993, newly elected President Clinton announced an executive order on Environmental Justice, which was signed February 1994 and defined environmental justice as:

the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies, practices and regulations. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local and tribal programs and policies. (Environmental Protection Agency, 2011)

Not surprisingly, despite their prominence in the principles of environmental justice, missing are the ideas of those foundational principles of "ecological unity" and "a sustainable planet for humans and other living things." The EPA's definition was only focused on humans and the movement to a large extent reflected that definition and its founding concern over environmental racism. Further, in its critique of environmentalism, the nascent movement defined itself in terms of social justice issues. As the

"Environmental Justice Timeline" from the Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 2002 states:

There is general agreement that environmental injustice existed long before the 1991 gathering. For many, having decent and affordable housing, access to health care, quality education, safe and secure employment at a livable wage, accessible public transportation, parks and green space, clean air, safe drinking water, and healthy food are basic rights. (Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, n.d.).

But the work of religious eco-justice groups, despite focusing on the same issues plus traditional environmental concerns, was viewed as separate.

There are of course additional reasons that the environmental justice movement became primarily secular. Despite the religious grounding of many groups, such as the UCC or grassroots groups like Jesus People Against Pollution of Columbia Miss, or the Coalition Against Nuclear Trash (CANT) in northern Louisiana, organizational activists were leery of religion and churches. Additionally, people of color groups and churches were wary of environmentalists, who seemed to care only about animals and wild places or who would come in to tell them what to do instead of listening. This is why the environmental justice movement proclaimed that "the environment is where we live, work, play, and learn," in order to counter the notion that the environment to be saved was somewhere else (Cole and Foster, 2001: 16).

In addition to being presented as primarily secular, the environmental justice movement in its early days also became synonymous with environmental racism, due to its origins in the Warren County struggle and the UCC report on Toxic Wastes and Race and to the disproportionate effects of degradation by Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics and other people of color. More recently, activism about the environmental degradation and pollution associated with mountaintop removal of coal, which mainly affects poor whites in Appalachia, or issues surrounding CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations), discussed below, are broadening the term "environmental justice" to more closely fit the EPA definition.

These tensions between religious environmentalism, environmental justice, environmental racism, and the more nature-focused environmental groups has been eased only in the last decade, as churches and religious environmental organizations have worked more closely with environmental justice groups, and people of color environmental organizations, such as Sustainable South Bronx or Wild Atlanta, have flourished and broadened their sense of environmental justice to include care and appreciation of nonhuman nature.

### ***The contribution of liberation theologies***

All of this activism was accompanied by significant developing conversations in the world of theology and below, due to space, I focus on the contributions primarily

coming from Christian theologians and ethicists, but there are similar contributions emerging in other faith traditions. For example, John Cobb, a well-known theologian linked to environmental concern and justice from early in his long career, asked in 1972: "Is it too late?" His concern for eco-justice, as well as a critique of economic values, was also present in other early theologians, but it was in ecofeminism that the linkages between attitudes toward nature and hierarchical forms of domination – as seen in sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, militarism, colonialism, and capitalism, and eventually heterosexism – were most fully explored from early on.

### Ecofeminist liberation theologies

For ecofeminists, ecological issues must be understood alongside issues of social justice. As Catholic eco-feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether declared, "We must speak of eco-justice and not simply the domination of the earth as though that happened unrelated to social domination" (Ruether, 1992: 3). The work of Ruether reveals the history and many of the dimensions of the conversation within ecofeminism, starting with her *New Woman, New Earth* (1975). She more fully explored the intersection of systems of domination and their legitimating worldviews in *Gaia and God* (1992), and brought attention to ecofeminists from around the globe in *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (2005), in which she highlighted the voices of Ivone Gebara, Vandana Shiva, and Wangari Maathai, among other global eco-feminists who ground their work toward eco-justice in their religion and spirituality. Their work shows the breadth of ecofeminism. Vandana Shiva, a physicist by training and a prolific writer, works tirelessly in India and around the globe to raise awareness of the connections between deteriorating environments and women's health and other justice issues, such as water privatization and the struggle for fresh, potable water among the majority of the global poor, bio-piracy, the globalization and monoculturalization of agribusiness, and the large gains in corporate power through the World Trade Organization (Shiva, 1997, 2002). The work of Brazilian Catholic sister and theologian Ivone Gebara (silenced by the Vatican from 1995–1997) reached a large audience through her most ecofeminist book, translated under the title *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (1999). In it, she illustrates the deep connection between the destruction of land and ecosystems and the lives of those whom she says are the most oppressed: urban poor women such as those in the favelas of Recife with whom she worked. Her work with the ecofeminist collective Con Spirando brings together women from throughout the Americas to explore the disproportionate burden that women, as the gatherers of firewood and water, as mothers and caretakers of the young, and as the highest gender percentage among the poor, pay for the destruction of forests, desertification, pollution of air and water, and lack of access to clean water, or to any water at all. In fact, all three work to draw attention to a growing global crisis over water, which has already caused conflict in many regions. Finally, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, through the Green Belt Movement (GBM) that she helped found in 1977, organized women in her home country of Kenya and all over the globe to plant

millions of trees to counter the deforestation that led to desertification, and left them walking farther and farther for firewood and water, often making them more vulnerable to attack. The GBM's mission – to mobilize community consciousness . . . for self-determination, equity, improved livelihoods and security for women, and environmental conservation – demonstrates once again the awareness that gender, economic, and social justice and equity are tied with sustainability (Green Belt Movement, n.d.). Seen as a primarily secular environmental movement, Maathai discusses how her vision has been grounded in both her Kikuyu heritage and her Catholic upbringing in her most recent book, *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World* (2010). These are just a few examples of visionary ecofeminist activists (ecowomanism is explored below) who demonstrate the centrality of justice issues in environmental concerns.

### Latin American liberation theology

Despite the early lead by eco-feminists (Ress, 2006), well-known Latin American liberation theologians were slower to enter the conversation. Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff is perhaps the most significant, with the publication of his vision of social ecology in *Ecology and Liberation* in 1995, its Portuguese original published in 1993 on the heels of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There, religious and environmental NGOs worked to criticize the dominant model of economic development, in which the clearing of land and the resultant diminishing biodiversity leads not to improvement, but to the impoverishment of people and the destruction of indigenous cultures. The model of economic development that has dominated, they pointed out, cares little for the local environment or the local people, but rather for generating income to service international debt and to facilitate the export of "natural resources" and the transfer of wealth to elites, often outside the country. Boff went on to publish the best-known liberation theology text, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (1997), articulating a theological/ecological holism and permanently embedding ecology as a concern for all liberation theologians.

Another side to this economic development model is the exporting of garbage and hazardous/toxic wastes not wanted at "home" or not in my backyard (NIMBY), but more globally, as economically wealthy countries uphold their strict environmental regulations by exporting the problems to the two-thirds world. Environmental ethicist Larry Rasmussen, in his widely hailed book *Earth Ethics, Earth Community* (1997), discusses the leaked 1991 memo written by Lawrence Summers, then chief economist of the World Bank, who suggested that the Bank should encourage the dumping of toxic wastes in "under populated countries in Africa," which he described as "under-polluted" (Rasmussen, 1997: 78). Liberation theologians, ever critical of the costs of capitalism, hailed this illuminating example of what the environmental justice movement already knew: environmentalism could be the source of injustice.

## Black liberation theology

Accompanying the growth of the environmental justice movement, the early 1990s also saw the emergence of black eco-liberation theology. Theodore Walker's 1993 article "African American Resources for a more inclusive Liberation Theology" addressed head on the reluctance of black churches and theologians to incorporate environmental concerns. In an important volume, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, womanist Shamara Shantu Riley (1993) declared "Ecology is a sistah's issue too" and Delores Williams (1993) articulated the connections between "Sin, nature and black women's bodies." Karen Baker-Fletcher gave full voice to Christian ecowomanism in *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (1998). More recently, ecowomanists such as Melanie Harris have been reclaiming Alice Walker's eco-spiritual vision (Harris, 2009). Cheryl Kirk Dugand's *The Sky is Falling* captures a wide range of voices responding to the myriad of injustices related to Hurricane Katrina. James Cone, a key black liberation theologian since the 1960s, demanded in 1999 "Whose earth is it anyway?" and gave religious voice to a full vision of environmental justice, declaring in the opening sentence, "[t]he logic that led to slavery and segregation . . . and the rule of white supremacy . . . is the same one that leads to the exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature" (Cone, 1999: 23). Equally important voices are present in indigenous liberation theologies (LaDuke 1999).

## Animal justice

Some theologians' specific inclusion of the exploitation of animals was important in connecting to the animal rights and animal welfare movements, which often are religiously grounded or motivated but seen as distinctly separate (Waldau and Patton, 2006). These movements have highlighted the terrible, filthy, inhumane conditions in care on the farm, during transport and the slaughter of agricultural animals. Many religious dietary certifications, such as kosher in Judaism and halal in Islam, are explicitly about the treatment of the animals being slaughtered, while other religions such as Hinduism and Jainism recognize the sacredness of some if not all animals. In the United States, animals such as chickens, cows, and pigs are kept in cages or pens with no room for natural movement in huge buildings, sometimes containing thousands of animals, often awash in their own excrement. In the case of chickens, they are confined to small cages where they cannot escape the flies and insects that swarm them, with their beaks cut off so they can't fight with each other, and animals remain where they die. For those who live near these factory farms, the water, soil, and air pollution from the animal excrement and poor care are serious issues that have broadened traditional environmental justice and religious eco-justice implications.

For many religious and secular environmentalists, concern over the unjust treatment of animals, such as that described above, and the rapid depopulation of marine species through over fishing or being "by-products" of the catch (e.g., dolphins captured in tuna

netting, turtles ensnared in shrimp fishing equipment, and bottom animals caught in drag nets) is often a reason given for vegetarianism or reduced meat eating (Ruether, 1992: 225). For others, vegetarianism is motivated by a distributive justice concern over the high "costs" of meat production, whether it is the ratio of pounds of grains per pound of meat (7:1 in cattle), or the ratio of water/energy per pound, to the clear cutting of vast acres of rainforests to provide grazing land for primarily exported beef that will be expended within a few years, or the deterioration of eco-systems from the presence of large numbers of animals or the disposal of their excrement (UNFAO, 2006).

Finally, other issues of justice for nonhuman animals include a range of issues of cruelty to those with whom we share this planet: animal fighting and hunting for sport; "puppy" or breeding mills; the smuggling of exotic species to supply the pet trade; the raising or hunting of animals for fur; the use of animals for medical and pharmaceutical experimentation and research, as well as what happens to those animals when the research is done; and the illegal hunting/poaching of animals for their parts thought to have medicinal or magical properties, such as sharks, rhinos, bears, and tigers. Harder for many to see are the issues of intergenerational justice posed by the loss of habitat and sufficient breeding populations of endangered species, what environmental ethicist would call the right to thrive. Because these issues concern the just treatment of animals and our relationships with them, the various aspects of the animal welfare/rights movement are often seen as very distinct from the environmental justice movement. Yet they involve aspects of human, animal and eco-system health and well-being, invoking those who care through an ethic of eco-justice for all.

## Food justice

As already seen, animal justice issues are frequently linked to food justice issues. While for most people these are distinct movements, religious eco-justice activists are increasingly bringing them together. The food justice movement, like the environmental justice movement, is often more explicitly anthropocentric in its focus on the treatment of farm workers, such as their exposure to hazardous chemicals and pesticides due to lack of protective clothing and indiscriminate spraying while in the field. This exposure can lead to respiratory and skin illnesses, cancers, even issues of sterility and reproductive disruption, such as in the case of banana workers in Central America. Farm worker injustice is further linked to the deplorable conditions in which migrant and farm workers live, as they are often undocumented or have few legal rights, and fear that employers will fire them, beat them, or turn them in if they seek redress. As has been documented in the tomato industry in Florida<sup>4</sup> or the chocolate/cocoa industry in Africa, many workers are living in modern slave conditions with no ability to leave or control their lives (Bowe, 2007). Food justice is also about access to affordable and healthy food.

Liberation theology's concerns for the empowerment of women and the poor and the improvement of communities through ecological restoration can all be seen in the Fair Trade movement, a central aspect of the food justice movement, which has engaged

religious communities throughout the globe. By definition, Fair Trade is about the interconnectedness of people's consumption patterns and eco-systems. The principles of a fair price to workers, ecological sustainability, and democratic cooperatives in which women are also involved are central to the movement's stated values. The goal of Fair Trade is to ensure a fair wage to the laborers by guaranteeing producers a fair price in advance, while encouraging sustainable farming practices that protect the workers, consumers, and the larger eco-system.

Fair Trade cocoa, chocolate, tea, bananas, clothing, artisan products, and other items are available, but coffee is by far the largest product, in part because it is the second most traded global commodity. World Bank economic development plans encouraged vast acres of sun-grown, mechanically picked Arabica coffee in places like Brazil and Vietnam, which did not traditionally grow coffee, producing cheap coffee, but destroying both the natural eco-systems of shade-grown coffee forests and the livelihoods of more sustainable coffee producers and pickers in traditional coffee-growing places like Guatemala, Kenya, and Ethiopia. Consumers, churches, and synagogues in North America and Europe learn of the connection between environmental degradation, habitat destruction, and poverty through lessons about a "just" cup of coffee. Joking that coffee after the service is also a religious ritual, religious groups seek to add a dimension of justice to their consumption habits and challenge the changed methods of coffee production. Fair Trade certification demands economic justice in terms of a fair and predictable wage for workers, eco-justice in terms of environmentally sustainable growing practices that keep forests and ecosystems intact and reduce the pesticides and herbicides sprayed on plants and workers that lead to the poisoning of humans and animals alike, and participatory justice in the goals of education, literacy, and cooperative and democratic decision making that includes women (Kearns, 2007). Fair Trade movements, while not necessarily religious, are heavily embraced by many religious organizations, because the concept of Fair Trade demonstrates the broad concept of eco-justice introduced earlier in this essay – justice for people, wildlife, and eco-systems alike, justice for all who desire to be part of healthy, functioning, sustainable eco-systems that lead to the thriving of all living beings.

### **Conclusion**

First and foremost, this essay has tried to demonstrate that justice concerns are central to environmental issues, in part due to the work of many religious leaders and groups. Acknowledging this, scientists and politicians have called for religious involvement to help others recognize that ecological health and well-being are moral concerns. Conversely, this essay has argued that environmental issues should be included in the religious concern for social justice. For most religious environmentalists, environmental issues should be on the agenda for all those who work for social justice. Third, environmental justice issues disproportionately affect those who are poor, powerless, and people of color, and, as such, demand full ethical consideration. Thus, this chapter

has attempted to give a sense of the breadth and complexity of environmental justice issues that will involve major discussions about distributive, participatory, procedural, restorative, intergenerational, and interspecies justice. This breadth indicates that what seems just for one may not seem so from another perspective. Fourth, the essay has tried to show that the growing awareness of the interconnectedness of planetary systems and their disruption means that actions in one place can have unforeseen and unjust consequences elsewhere, as climate change so fully demonstrates.

Fifth, the chapter has argued for the concept of eco-justice, or a full vision of environmental justice that includes humans and all living creatures, so that environmental justice issues are not seen as only those involving humans, further complicating any notion of justice. Just and right relations must include all living beings. Finally, in light of the vision of eco-justice, any discussion of the justice dimension of environmental issues will involve difficult conversations about human rights versus biotic rights. Religious voices that affirm the intrinsic worth of all of creation add a crucial dimension to this discussion.

In addition to the issues described here, there are many more that cannot be covered adequately, whether it is methods of coal extraction, such as mountaintop removal in the United States; or the impact of extractive industries on indigenous groups globally; or the destruction of small-scale farming in places like India and Korea, driving farmers to suicide or diminishing habitat for the endangered species and indigenous peoples of the North; or the "ownership" and manipulation of the DNA of plants and animals. Beyond all of these, climate change looms as one of the largest environmental justice or eco-justice concerns of all, asking us to think about the consequences of our actions on a scale few are used to, and with future generations to come in mind. The thriving of the planet is intricately linked to the thriving of humans and all living creatures, even those yet to come.