Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life

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Conserving the World in Faith: An in-depth study of how faith inspires environmentalism

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Executive Summary

In 2024, IIFL launched a new project exploring the relationship between faith and sustainability. The research had two phases. The first was a quantitative study in which IIFL commissioned a bespoke, nationally representative survey of 2,396 UK adults examining the relationship between faith and environmentalism across religious groups, regions, and ages. The final report, "Stewardship: Exploring Faith and Sustainability," was published in June 2024.[1] The second phase was a qualitative study using interviews to delve deeper into the survey's findings and explore new areas beyond the scope of quantitative data collection. Interviews also allowed us to give voice to Jewish, Sikh and Buddhist perspectives, which were underrepresented in the survey and so could not be considered statistically significant. This report sets out the key findings from the qualitative study in the context of the findings from the first phase.

Here are the key findings from both phases of the project. All statistics refer to findings from "Stewardship: Exploring Faith and Sustainability." The full report and data sets can be found on the IIFL website.

Dharmic Traditions

A deep sense of relationality held by Dharmic traditions shaped a conception of social justice as a strong motivating factor that differed from monotheistic perspectives. While Dharmic ideas of social justice appear rooted first in the profound interconnection of all existence, monotheistic views appear rooted in more concrete ideas of the need for social and economic stability and equality. Social justice definitions based on the intrinsic relationality of the world appeared as stronger motivators for environmental efforts than those based on concrete life conditions.

- **Hindu respondents lead in personal environmental actions and environmental concern**

Hindu respondents showed the highest levels of concern for the impacts of climate change leading them to be the most active in various personal environmental actions. 64% of exclusivist Hindu respondents participated in rewilding, compared to 31% of exclusivist Muslim respondents and 22% of exclusivist Christian respondents. They also led in changing consumer habits (78%), donating to charities (63%), and joining environmental groups (44%).[2] Hindu respondents were then most likely to consider environmentalism when voting.

Hindus are more likely to view, in very tangible ways, the whole world as an 'ecosystem' in

1 Charlotte Littlewood, Rania Mohiuddin-Agir, & Amanda Murjan, "Stewardship: Exploring Faith and Sustainability," commissioned by The Institute for the Impact of Faith, https://iifl.org.uk/reports/report-sustainability-exploring-faith-and-sustainability/, (2024).
2 Ibid, pp 27-29

which all existence is intrinsically connected and thereby all things in the world are viewed as co-existing in essential interdependency. This means every human action has a consequence somewhere within the world. The simple act of picking a flower sends ripples of effects occurring within the world, time and space. This leads to a tangible sense of cause and effect and of existing in profound relation with the world.

Hindus also believe that all objects in the world are open to being viewed as 'spaces to worship God.' It is not the object itself that is worshipped but God within the object. This offers a view of reality in which all is sacred and therefore to care for the environment is to worship God and serve all creation, for all creation is profoundly connected in the divine.

Our Hindu respondents (along with Buddhists) placed a greater emphasis than other faiths we sampled on directly experiencing the importance of environmentalism – affirming and engaging in it for its own sake – over doing so in obedience to religious commandments. Hindus were more likely to emphasise the role of experience, conscience and interior over exterior motivations than respondents of other faiths. This means that Hindus are more likely to engage in environmentalism because they feel and know its value, rather than doing so through religious obligation. This ties in with the survey's findings that Hindus were not primarily motivated by religious doctrine. The survey data revealed that Hindus were the least likely to feel obligated by their faith to care for the environment (80%), compared to Christians (82%) and Muslims (92%).[3]

Monotheism

Monotheist beliefs afforded less importance to the environment in part owed to an understanding of social justice that was less rooted in the well-being of the Earth.

Contrasts in Muslim and Christian approaches to environmentalism are, in part, rooted in Muslims viewing climate change as one of the many 'tests' of this world, leading to a more 'active' approach to climate change than Christians whose views were more likely to be shaped by beliefs about God's omnipotence and second coming. Viewing climate change as a test, a challenge to which we must rise, might be more conducive to motivating conservation efforts than approaches emphasising God's power and intended restoration of the Earth. The latter implies a passive reliance on God while the former implies a greater reliance on the proper use of human agency regardless of expected or prophesied outcomes.

- **Climate change denial is highest amongst exclusivist Christian respondents**

Exclusivist Christian respondents showed the highest levels of climate change denial, with 31% agreeing with the statement "I don't believe the global climate is changing." This contrasts starkly with exclusivist Muslim respondents at 17%.[4] Christian respondents in general were least likely to recognise the harms of climate change, to take personal environmental actions

3 Ibid, p 21
4 Ibid, pp 12-19

and to vote with environmentalism in mind. Despite their climate denial, exclusivist Christian respondents also held strong beliefs in their faith's requirement to care for the world, indicating influences other than their faith are guiding the outlook on climate change.

A possible explanation for the higher levels of climate change denial within Christianity than in other faiths may lie in beliefs in the second coming of Christ. Christians may believe this event would protect humanity from the full impact of climate change. Our data suggests that other possible explanations include science scepticism and distrust of the media.

General Faith Findings

- **Voting and attitudes towards sustainability**

The non-faith group was more likely than the faith group to vote based on all measures of environmental policies given in the survey. The differences were marginal but consistent. The faith groups showed less or equal interest in green policies in comparison to the non-faith group.[5]

Voting in line with green issues appears shaped more by secular concerns than religious ones. Our data suggests that a sense of inevitability of voting outcomes and concern for more immediate and pressing issues, such as education, healthcare and finances, influence voting more significantly than religious beliefs.

- **Youth more environmentally minded and more likely to connect their faith with environmentalism[6]**

Young respondents were most likely to agree with the statement that God is in control and therefore there is no need to worry about climate change; 33% and 34% of the two youngest groups compared with only 11% of the 65+ group. However, younger populations are more likely to agree with the statement that "God is an environmentalist" and are more concerned over and engaged in environmental actions compared to older generations. For instance, 46% of 18-24-year-olds agree that "God is an environmentalist," compared to just 17% of those aged 65+. This trend indicates a generational shift in integrating religious beliefs with environmental stewardship.

- **Belief in faith's requirement to care for the world is consistent across faiths, yet not translating into consistent action**

Hindu, Muslim and Christian respondents consistently believed their faith requires them to care for the world. This was most pronounced among exclusivist Muslim respondents (92%)

5 Ibid, pp 30-35

6 Ibid. These findings refer to all sections of "Stewardship: Exploring Faith and Sustainability." These findings refer only to the phase one report because there were no participants aged 18-24 in the interview sample.

and exclusivist Christian respondents (82%), showing a consistent belief across faiths that humanity has environmental responsibility.[7]

Despite this there was little difference in concern or direct action between those of faith and those without faith. 70% of the faith group and 71% of the non-faith group agreed that climate change is one of the most important issues in the world today and faith groups reported only marginally higher rates of participation in four of the seven conservation activities measured in the survey.[8]

Hindu respondents were the most concerned and simultaneously active, followed by Muslim respondents and lastly Christian respondents. This indicated cultural and socio-political influences on the different faith groups impacting concern and particular action rather than doctrine.

People of faith's concern for the environment appear motivated and shaped by more than religious beliefs and values. Our data suggests that the environmental motivations of people with faith are shaped by diverse factors including tradition and culture, and fears about finances, health, education, and caring for dependents.

7 Ibid, p.21

8 Attitudes to Faith in British Life Tracker for the Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life, commissioned by Whitestone Insight (June 2024). Document available on request from IIFL. Figures show percentage of group reporting engagement in the following activities within the last month. Litter picking: Faith Group (FG) 9%/ Non-faith Group (NFG) 14%. Tree planting: FG 4%/ NFG 2%. Charitable donations: FG 5%/ NFG 4%. Joined environmental organisation: FG 3%/ NFG 1%. Participated in an environmental protest: FG 2%/ NFG 1%. Stopped eating meat or changed transport: FG 12%/ NFG 15%. Changed consumer habits: FG 12%/ NFG 12%.

Introduction

Faith-based motivations are shaped by a dynamic interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivations refer to following religious instructions or feeling an ethical imperative to care for the environment, while intrinsic motivations refer to a desire to draw closer to God and realise one's potential in faith by caring for the environment. The balance between these motivations varies according to religious belief and context.

While conservation efforts for people of faith were motivated by a range of, at times, competing religious and secular concerns, our findings showed there are distinct faith-based motivations for environmentalism that not only inspire but sustain conservation efforts.

A sense of relationality with the world through faith shapes motivation to care for the environment and take practical action toward sustainability. Our data suggests that the more one feels connected to the world through God or the transcendent, in which the divine is made visible, the more one is motivated to take practical action for the environment.

Phase two of the report was shaped by four key findings from the survey data.

First, Hindus led in personal environmental concerns and actions but were the least likely to be motivated by scriptural observances.[9] While Hindus were the least likely to cite faith obligations to care for the planet as primary motivations, they showed the highest levels of concern for the impacts of climate change leading them to be the most active in personal environmental actions. Interviews allowed us to ask what motivates Hindu concern for the environment in the absence of a primary emphasis on adhering to scriptural instruction.

Second, the survey data revealed a discrepancy between religious beliefs in the importance of environmentalism and direct action. That is, while faith groups reported their faith affirmed the importance of conservation there were only marginal differences between direct conservation action taken by faith and non-faith groups. This second phase allowed us to ask why religious imperatives of care for the world did not translate to more consistent and direct action than secular ones.

Third, and connected to this question, why did this higher attribution of importance to environmentalism by religious groups not also lead to more voting on green lines than people without faith? Our data showed that secular groups were more likely than faith groups to vote on every environmental policy given in the survey. That is, faith groups consistently albeit marginally showed less or equal interest in green policies compared to nonfaith groups. Why higher attributions of importance to conservation did not lead religious groups to vote on green issues more than secular groups could be explored through interviews.

9 Littlewood, Mohiuddin-Agir, & Murjan, "Stewardship: Exploring Faith and Sustainability," p. 22.

Finally, our survey found that climate change denial was highest among Christians. Exclusivist Christian respondents showed the highest levels of climate change denial, with 31% agreeing with the statement "I don't believe the global climate is changing."[10] Through interviews, we could ask how Christians account for this finding.

Shaped by this data, the interview questions covered six areas: (1) motivations for environmentalism; (2) key areas of environmental interest; (3) accounting for discrepancies between attributions of importance and direct action among religious groups; (4) the relationship between voting and faith-based environmental concerns, and; (5) faith-specific inquiries.

This report summarises the key findings of interviews with 31 participants from across the UK. Participants were recruited through the IIFL website. The sample consisted of participants from the following religious groups: 5 Christians, 6 Muslims, 5 Buddhists, 4 Sikhs, 6 Jews, and 5 Hindus.

Interview Questions

1) How do you understand your faith's perspective on care for the environment?

2) In what ways does your faith motivate you to care for the environment?

3) In what ways does your faith shape your interest in particular green issues?

4) The IIFL recently conducted a large-scale survey into faith and environmentalism. This project found that while all respondents believed their religion spoke to the importance of caring for the environment, this did not often translate to people of faith taking more action than those without faith.

What are your thoughts on why religious belief in the importance of environmental care isn't leading people of faith to take more action than people without faith?

5) Despite the high importance given by faith groups to care for the environment, our research found that faith did not significantly influence voting decisions in favour of green issues.

How would you explain this and to what extent do your environmental concerns shape your political views?

Faith-specific final questions

Christian

10 Ibid, pp 12-19. This contrasts with exclusivist Hindu (24%) and Muslim (17%) respondents.

Our research found that Christians were more likely than other religious groups to deny climate change (31%) and take less action towards environmental issues.[11] Yet Christians also believed, in equal measure to other religious groups, that they have a responsibility given to them by their faith to care for the environment.

What are your thoughts on these findings of higher climate change denial and less action towards green concerns in Christian groups?

Muslim

Our research showed that Muslim respondents were significantly less likely (27%) than Christian (42%) and Hindu (50%) respondents to believe there was no need to be overly concerned about climate change because God will restore the world.[12]

How do you think the end-of-times prophecies in Islam influence concern for and actions towards the environment, if at all?

Hindu

Our research showed that Hindu respondents (80%) were less likely than respondents from other faiths (Muslims 92% and Christians 82%) to view environmental concerns and actions towards these concerns as a responsibility given by their faith.

However they were most environmentally sustainable with respect to practical action.

What are your thoughts on this finding and what do you think distinguishes Hindu motivations from other faiths to care for the environment in the absence of religious obligation?

Sikh and Jewish

(Sikh and Jewish questions were intentionally broad to gauge the landscape of views due to lower samples in the surveys)

What is your experience of how Sikh/Jewish communities view and take action towards environmental issues?

Buddhist

(While the Buddhist sample was also small, the doctrinal difference of the absence of a creator God is significant and therefore worth including.)

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11 Ibid sections 2,3 & 5. 31% of Christians reported climate change denial compared to 24% of Hindus and 17% of Muslims. Christians reported the lowest rates of conservation efforts across all measures compared to Hindus and Muslims. See sections 2, 3 & 5 of

12 Ibid, p 22

Our research showed that environmental concerns in many religions were predominantly shaped by the idea of a creator God who is viewed to have given humanity stewardship over the Earth. Yet, while Buddhists believe in gods, they do not believe in a creator God.

What do you think distinguishes Buddhist motivations from other faiths to care for the environment in the absence of belief in a creator God?

Q 1 & 2: Religious motivations to care for the environment

How do you understand your faith's perspective on care for the environment?

In what ways does your faith motivate you to care for the environment?

Christianity

"It says in Genesis that we should care for the environment . . . when the Lord said to Adam . . . gave him the garden of Eden and then said to him to look after the garden. From that, I just honestly feel like people should be taking of their surroundings." (EE)

The biblical instruction for stewardship was a key motivating factor among Christian participants. In this quote, Elizabeth (EE) references Genesis 2, which states "Yahweh God took Man and placed him in the garden [of Eden] to till it and take care of it" (Christian Community Bible, 2:15). Christian respondents shared an understanding that God created the world and offered it to humanity as a gift, but there are responsibilities attached to this gift: humanity is instructed to care for and preserve this gift, to ensure it can flourish in the fullness God intended. One way in which Christian participants expressed their motivation to care for the environment was through obedience to God's instruction to care for the world given to humanity as a gift.

This supports our survey findings showing that 82% of exclusivist Christians and 57% of non-exclusivist Christians agreed that their faith obligates them to care for the environment.[13]

However, the mandate of stewardship extended beyond mere instruction. There were deeper reasons cited for caring for the environment, which shifted beyond external motivations of adherence to rules and into more interior motivations connected to the type of person respondents believed a Christian is called to be. Elizabeth expressed this idea of an interior motivation for environmentalism as not simply something they do, but something they are.

"...my parents always said you need to be an example to those that aren't Christian. So then the question is, well how do you conduct yourself? What kind of person are you?" (EE)

This speaks to the idea that caring for the environment reflects the type of person someone wishes to be and therefore embodies something of what it means to be a Christian.

Sophie (SEC-R) explains that a further way that motivations extend beyond adherence to rules is by seeing that God's Creation is simply beautiful. Quoting the Bible, she explained that after each stage of Creation, "God saw that it was good" (SEC-R). Seeing God in the world's beauty is an important motivator for environmentalism, such that a person cares for the environment

13 Ibid, p 22

not merely because they are instructed to do so but because they desire intimacy with the God they see reflected in the world.

For these respondents, following God's commandment of stewardship is not simply a matter of complying with divine instruction, of doing so because they feel they must. It is a matter of doing so because they want to – they want to become who they feel they are called to be by caring for "the beautiful creation that God made" (SEC-R).

To this end, environmentalism reflects the person they wish to be and serves to deepen their relationship with God. Christian motivations to care for the environment are in a dynamic interplay involving movements of the "heart" in their various forms and adherence to Scriptural commandments.

Judaism

The low number of Jewish participants in the survey meant that their responses could not be considered statistically significant. One of the purposes of the project's second phase was to highlight Jewish insights into environmentalism.

Stewardship instruction in the Jewish scriptures was also a key theme for Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg (JW), the Rabbi of the New North London Synagogue and founder of Eco Judaism.

"On a very basic level, there's an understanding that this is not our world to do with as we like, but Creation. It's God's world where we have a duty of stewardship. This is expressed by the Bible in many places, but the most frequently quoted is in the second chapter of Genesis . . . [there's an] understanding of reverence, respect, and obedience to God's will." (JW)

Rabbi Jonathan roots a belief in God's mandate to care for the world, in the fundamental relationship between humanity and the world.

"Judaism has a language of Commandments of what God wants of us . . . one is the Commandment not to needlessly destroy . . . destruction is forbidden and is a sin . . . [including] cruelty to animals which includes domestic animals and wild animals so that really affects our relationship with non-human life . . . There is also the importance of biodiversity – that every creature has its place within the bio ecosystem of creation and the story of Noah, as it were, taking two of every creature, of none being left out . . . [there is a] theme of ensuring that all species can reproduce and survive." (JW)

The commandment of stewardship implies a relationship of care between humanity and non-human life from which flows a desire for all life to thrive. Rabbi Jonathan expressed this relationship as a sense of recognising God's presence in all life.

"[There is] a strong sense that the presence of God abides in all life and so where there's life there's the presence of God and that's in trees, in birds, in animals, that all of them as it were sing their song before God the Creator. That speaks very, very viscerally to me as an

experiential and personal relationship with life, with all life, plant life, animal life, and non-human life." (JW)

This connection with all life shifts the motivation to care for the environment "deeper than just instruction," explains Rabbi Jonathan – "It becomes visceral – it becomes very real." This is a strong idea in the Jewish mystical tradition. Together, these motivations create "a very powerful framework for understanding that it is mandated to care for all life, human and non-human and therefore to protect our environment, to do what we can" (JW).

Whether through the perceived "beauty" of creation or the experience of a "visceral connection" with Creation, Christian and Jewish participants expressed the sense of something else at work beyond obedience to commandments that motivates their care for the environment.

For Rabbi Jonathan, part of this deeper connection to the Earth that shapes a person's motivation to protect the environment involves cultivating a better understanding of how human beings impact the world, both intentionally and unintentionally.

"It goes deeper than that in our current sort of Western Civilization, or Northern civilization if one prefers that, of which Britain is a part. There is so much that we participate in and can't necessarily avoid participating in that is destructive to the world around us, and I would understand myself as mandated to do what I can to limit and avoid those kinds of destructive activities . . . perhaps mixed in with this question is that I feel implicated in aspects of a civilization which, as I get older, I feel are wrong . . . So one of the first steps here is to make ourselves conscious of the consequences of how we live - for other species, the Earth, the soil, and the heirs themselves." (JW)

This greater consciousness of the human impact on the world instils a connection with future generations in addition to the Earth and its current inhabitants.

"There's a rabbinic saying: 'Do not destroy my world because there's no one who can come after you to put it right.' So, I would see myself mandated by commandment and by social responsibility, and by something as much emphasized in Judaism . . . [which is a] responsibility towards children, towards the future - being a good ancestor . . . that's very powerful with the Jewish tradition . . . what do I leave after me? What am I leaving for my children? There can be no Judaism if there's no world to live in." (JW)

While Rabbi Jonathan shows that theological accounts of Judaism may be interpreted as supporting and even driving conservation, this position was not shared by all Jewish participants. Max (MB-N) highlighted tensions between traditional Jewish practices and the demands of conservation. Max felt that while Judaism wants to care for the environment, many of its traditional practices involve using excessive resources, which he claimed makes them far from energy efficient. These traditional practices have become problematic with an increasing awareness of the need for more sustainable living.

“It's a tricky one because on the one hand, Judaism really wants to protect the environment but on the other hand some of the things they have in place . . . go against all the environmental things that they stand for . . . all the things that they do to try and keep . . . the Sabbath . . . [it] is not very environmentally friendly . . . it's really unsustainable.” (MB-N)

Max explained that his desire and commitment to protect the environment was not rooted in his faith because its traditional practices – how he sees his faith lived – can sometimes appear at odds with environmental causes. He claimed his motivation rather lies in a conviction to “ensure that future generations have the resources that we do or to some extent even better” (MB-N).

These Jewish respondents speak to the diverse ways in which religious beliefs and practices intersect with environmental concerns. Religion can cultivate and sustain motivations to conserve the environment by not only providing helpful examples of how to enact this concern but also in the ongoing challenge to negotiate the meaning of religious traditions in an evolving world. Christian and Jewish participants expressed the importance of a relationship with the world established in and through God which informed their environmentalism and allowed them to grow in faith.

Islam

“It is an important factor in our faith and it is something we should consider in our daily lives. I wish it was something we did consider more, regarded as important in this day and age. Society has become more materialistic and it’s more about consuming, so I think it’s been disregarded...it’s something that’s been forgotten.” (TM)

Tahira (TM) spoke about the impact of the relationship between religion and cultural norms on religious motivations to care for the environment. In this passage, she claims that wider cultural trends towards consumerism are being prioritised over religious obligations. This highlights the deep interconnection between religious beliefs and practices and socio-cultural norms, such as beliefs about the material goods we can and should desire to possess. Tahira expresses the challenges sometimes encountered in adhering to religious instructions and practices when they appear in tension with social and cultural norms, even when such practices are recognised as spiritual goods.

Socio-cultural norms and the environments we are raised in, however, impact the expression of religious beliefs and practices in other ways, as this participant explains:

“Even though our religion says that we all need to make sure we look after our environment and our surroundings, [some people of different cultures] were raised in dirty environments or they were not really taught how to look after the environment, [so they still litter]. I think culture has a big role to play, not just religion.” (Anon)

These participants expressed the important interplay between religious traditions and the social and physical environments in shaping motivations to conserve the environment.

Tahira's account also highlights how dynamic interpretations of religious concepts can shape motivations. Here, she explains the complexity of her understanding of Islam's emphasis on charity.

". . . a big thing in my faith is charity and also putting others before yourself and caring for others caring for animals and the environment. So, I guess even planting a tree for instance is an act of charity and so I guess that's what pushes me towards even having that consideration because knowing that if I take these actions it's like an act of charity. So, in that way, I can gain rewards [blessings] and also do charity work . . . it's spiritual charity but it's still charity at the end of the day. So, I guess that's the biggest thing that pushes me." (TM)

Tahira understands the concept of charity in Islam in different ways. In one sense, she refers to charity as concrete acts of giving. In another, she explains charity as a broader disposition and intention to put others or causes greater than one's own needs and desires before oneself. In yet another sense, charity has a spiritual dimension – it is connected to spiritual rewards or blessings. The kinds of rewards referenced here are spiritual rewards in this life and the next.

"So we believe that any good deed that we do, we gain spiritual rewards, which we will be able to reap and take advantage of in the Hereafter. Also, in this world as well because any good deed that we do we believe that we'll see that manifest in this world, like being able to live a good life and being free from major problems or things like that. So I guess with the spiritual . . . obviously we believe in the concept of heaven and hell, so being able to enter Heaven and being able to earn rewards once there." (TM)

This speaks to the complexity of faith-based motivations for environmentalism. Respondents expressed that they were motivated to care for the environment not merely because they believed they had been instructed to do so, but because they believed it was part of becoming who they felt called to be, of participating in God's work; it is a path of holiness. It reflects an all-encompassing intention to care for God's creation in all its breadth, and in doing so, to receive blessings in this life and the next.

When environmentalism is tied to beliefs about how we participate in and realise our human potential in the divine, it becomes open to being shaped by specific faith beliefs about how this happens. For example, Islam may emphasise duty more than Christianity in pursuing holiness. When speaking about interior environmental motivations, Christian participants referred to a profound love of God and seeing God in the beauty of the world rather than "good deeds" and "spiritual rewards." If environmentalism becomes a path of holiness and the fulfilment of duty is viewed as a condition for holiness then conservation efforts will be shaped by and motivated by a desire for holiness expressed in the fulfilment of duty. This might be a possible explanation for our survey's finding of higher rates of direct action by Muslims over Christians, who may be inspired towards conservation action by fulfilling what they believe to be the conditions for holiness.[14]

The interplay between religious traditions and the social and physical environments in shaping motivations to conserve the environment highlighted by these participants might account for

14 Ibid. See section 5, pp 26-30

the discrepancy found in our survey between the professed importance of environmentalism by faith groups and direct conservation action.[15] These participants suggest that in addition to faith obligations, the concrete conditions of life impact conservation efforts. They speak to more factors at play in environmental engagement by faith groups than religious beliefs and practices.

Sikhism

Along with Jewish participants, Sikhs were also underrepresented in the survey, which meant their responses could not be considered statistically significant. One of the purposes of the project's second phase was then also to better understand Sikh perspectives on environmentalism.

Sikh respondents expressed the importance of traditional practices over, though not to the exclusion of, Scripture in shaping their motivations towards environmentalism. Parmi (PM) felt this might largely be explained by the fact that Sikh Scriptures are held in gurdwaras and written in multiple languages.

"I've never really actually read the Holy Scriptures. Obviously, go to the gurdwara and I'll listen to the hymns and listen to them at home, but they have a translation service at some temples, so they translate into English so you can really understand it because obviously our holy book is made of different languages from ancient generations . . . So I don't know if there's something specifically in there about the environment, but we've always been taught to respect the land because the land is what feeds us. It's our tradition." (PM)

Jasmine (JC) experienced these traditions as an "ingrained" desire, a sense of something being simply the right thing to do, rather than obedience to an instruction. Put another way, Sikh respondents emphasised interior sources of motivation over but not to the exclusion of external sources: the importance of caring for the environment because that's who she is rather than, yet not excluding, caring for the environment because it is simply the right thing to do.

"I think it's just that again the beliefs that have been ingrained in me and sort of within Sikhism that we need to have respect for the environment, for nature, and this encourages me to live a kind life. My life is as sustainable as possible . . . just all about kind of protecting the resources for the future . . . I feel as though it's our duty as well to be that good person . . . it's about doing the right thing and what God wants us to do to be that better person, and it's about protecting the resources for our future generations, for our families." (JC)

The meaning of Sikh traditions was further expressed through a sense of wholeness and integration with nature.

"It's definitely a strong belief . . . that we should care for the environment . . . we want things to be in a blissful state and to be in harmony with everything . . . I think it's kind of an integrated approach to life." (JC)

15 Ibid, p 22 and Section 5

Parmi explained that she expresses this sense of connection with creation by practising "grounding exercises."

"I think it's about general respect. So, I've been trying to teach my daughter grounding. She just thinks why would you rub your feet on the ground? I've taught her that she should thank the trees when she goes into the woods or the park . . . we should thank these trees, it's a privilege to walk in a forest or woods in a city like Birmingham." (PM)

These narratives speak to the diverse ways in which "lived religion" or religion understood within the specific and unique contexts in which it developed and is experienced can shape how environmentalism is understood and engaged. These participants show that religious observance can motivate us to care for the environment primarily through traditional socio-cultural practices. While these likely have their roots to varying degrees in Scripture, it appears their cultural expression alone can be sufficient motivation.

In this regard, Sikh perspectives differed from those of the monotheists. Compared to Christians, Muslims and Jews, Sikh respondents emphasised tradition, culture and direct experience in at least equal measure, if not more so than, scripture.

Hinduism

Hindu respondents expressed their faith's position on environmentalism through a similar lens of the interconnection of all creation.

"What my generation has been taught since we were kids is that we are part of an ecosystem. You are not a master of the ecosystem. You are just a small part of it. So my faith is very instrumental in making me love the environment." (SC)

Shilpi (SC) explained that being part of an "ecosystem" implied systems of cause and effect that bind human and non-human life in all its diverse forms.

". . . if you interfere with or if you try to meddle with the environment, with any organism that makes up the environment or the micro-ecosystem where you are, then you are harming your own self . . . their own existence, their own survival." (SC)

Supta (SB) explained the fundamental interconnection of all things that ties each person to all existence in a relationship of mutual and reciprocal cause and effect as God's presence. It is God in all things that connects all things.

"In our religion, everything you see in the environment, not only humans, like the trees and the animals, everything has life. We believe that, and we believe that their spirit is part of God. So it's like you are not alone in this world, that you have life. You have the spirit from God . . . the animals, the trees, everyone has this part of spirit." (SB)

The implications for perceiving God in all things are that one experiences oneself as part

of a far larger whole and views all things with reverence, as worthy of worship. From this perspective, taking care of the environment in all its diversity is a form of worship.

"So I believe that in this way you have to take care of everything. By worshipping them, you are worshipping God. If you take care of them, you are respecting your God whatever you believe in . . . if you worship something that means you have to take care of it, right? You have to respect them and take care of them . . . I was educated in this way." (SB)

Bansari (BR) cited the principles of Karma and non-violence as underlying ideas on interconnection. Karma, in its broadest sense, speaks to a system of cause and effect, of all actions having consequences, in this life and the next. Karma ties each person to existence through this system of mutual cause and effect. It also promotes and protects the concept of non-violence.

"And so in Hinduism, there is a lot of importance placed on the teachings and practices you follow. So karma is one of them. All your actions have a consequence, whether that's a good action then it'll be a good thing, if it's a bad one, it's a bad consequence . . . then there's the principle of non-violence. Part of that principle is why the majority of Hindus are vegetarian . . . that kind of falls into line with the environment too because it's about non-violence and looking after our environment." (BR)

Hindu accounts of motivations to care for the environment speak to the importance of relationality in cultivating a sense of responsibility for the world. For these respondents, the desire and willingness to protect the environment directly results from how they perceive their relationship with God who is to be found in all existence and therefore within all life.

This is unsurprising considering our results which showed that Hindu respondents were less likely to attribute their environmentalism to scriptural obligations than Christians and Muslims.[16]

Buddhism

The low number of Buddhist participants in the survey meant that their responses could not be considered statistically significant. One of the purposes of the project's second phase was to highlight Buddhist insights into environmentalism.

One defining feature distinguishes Buddhism from the other faith groups sampled in this project - Buddhists do not believe in a creator God. While some Buddhist traditions affirm the existence of gods or spiritual entities, they are not the creator God of the Hindus and Abrahamic faiths. Moreover, some Buddhists are atheists, as Olivia Fuchs, who is the project coordinator of the Eco Dharma Network and member of the steering committee of Faith for the Climate and the COP Faith Task group, explains:

". . . with the form of Buddhism [I practice] we don't have any Gods at all . . some people might say, that's God and it's the same thing but there's nothing outside of ourselves that's created.

16 Ibid, p 22

So, I see in a way that we are part of life, which is experiencing itself . . . it's constantly evolving and creating itself and we're part of that . . . in a way it's like life is becoming more and more conscious of itself, and I'd say we are." (OF)

This shared evolution of life and humanity to ever-greater levels of consciousness has important implications for how Buddhists understand the relationship between human beings and nature.

"We have a real sense of everything being interconnected or interdependent. It's sometimes called dependent origination . . . So if you're looking after your environment you look after yourself, the two are completely interdependent. There's also the oneness of self and environment, which is a big concept in Buddhism. So, you can't see it as a separation and of course, we have to care for nature, for our environment because we want to care for ourselves and each other." (OF)

Olivia described this interconnection through the metaphor of Indra's net.

"Indra is actually Hindu god, but he's like the god of the universe. It's often explained that he has this great big net or web and at each intersection of this net there's a precious jewel. If you pull one string in the net, all the jewels move and reflect each other. So, they sort of refract each other and this is very empowering. It shows that if you change something inside yourself or in your environment, it's going to affect the whole because it's all interconnected. . . It's an ecological system in a way, but also it affects the whole universe. So, it's a very empowering belief. Whether we actually really truly believe it and do it is always another matter, but it's very strong . . . the connection between our inner spiritual life and outer actions . . . " (OF)

The connection between interior and exterior lives – the mind and action – is important because it resists the temptation to "focus [on the interior life] at the expense of outer action, which sometimes Buddhism has been accused of" (OF).

"So the sticking point I think is not really our beliefs. How do I understand the Buddhist perspective and care for the environment? Basically that we are the environment so we take care of it as we would take care of ourselves." (OF)

Another participant raised the significance of seeing the world in profound interdependence, subject to systems of cause and effect, and its implications for how Buddhists might view conservation.

"Cause and effect guides everything and it's what guides us to understand outcomes. In order to not suffer from consequences, we should do less harm. Think about fires for instance. There are more of them happening, but this is because we are doing something bad. Cause and effect can be used to explain some of the catastrophic damages to the environment that lead to outcomes." (Anon)

The emphasis on relationality and its implications for human life viewed through the lens of karma was fundamentally important to these Buddhist accounts of motivations for

environmentalism. The interconnection is such that a key principle underlying these narratives appears to be that if you take care of the environment, you are taking care of yourself, for one cannot thrive without the other.

This result was similar to that given by Hindus, which is unsurprising considering the Dharmic roots of both faiths and their shared cultural and historic roots in South Asia that are steeped in a spiritual history that affords spiritual importance to nature.

Summary

Running through these accounts is a shared concern to marry the mind with the heart, scriptural observance with genuine care, intention with action, and religious practice with sociocultural demands. Christians, Jews, and Muslims spoke more about motivations for environmentalism, such as obedience to scripture, worshipping God in the world, and a path of holiness in which we are transformed in grace. Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists emphasised tradition, interconnection, interdependence, and interior motivation as stronger drives for conservation.

However, all faiths shared a recognition that everything spoken in faith is touched by the transcendent and therefore must speak to much more than a sense of following the rules. Faith-inspired environmentalism speaks to conservation as more than something we do, even when it involves deep care and attention. It speaks to cultivating an ever-deeper awareness of our essential connection with all existence and as we transform the world, in even the smallest of ways, so we are transformed - it is a path of holiness. In all cases, caring for the world is finally in service of the greater good.

Q 3: Specific conservation areas of interest

In what ways does your faith shape your interest in particular green issues?

Christianity

Our survey findings showed that Christians were less likely than Hindu and Muslim respondents to participate in direct conservation action.[17] These interview responses highlight possible reasons for these findings.

The visibility of specific climate issues was highlighted as important in shaping conservation. Sophie expressed her sense of deep connection between the visibility of environmental problems and seeing God's presence in all things.

"So I think mine probably stems from things I can control . . . I think back to kind of the beauty of God's world, seeing God in the world. I think the things I've picked are also things that I can visually see . . . I can see how dirty that looks in the world and I think that would prompt more interest than something that I may not be able to visually see or monitor such as kind of pollution and things like that . . . it probably doesn't make as big an impact on me as something that's visual." (SG)

While it seems intuitive that the greater the visibility of the environmental problem, the greater its impact on our consciousness, this passage points to another theological reason why visibility may be important to people of faith. If God is made visible in the world's beauty, then there is a sense in which a diminution in the perceived beauty of the world somehow obscures God's presence. Preserving the world's beauty then preserves God's visibility within all Creation. To this end, the idea of connecting with a visual image also speaks to the desire to experience and preserve a connection with God through the visible world.

Convenience was also highlighted as a factor shaping conservation concerns. Elizabeth explained she focused on recycling and described its religious significance.

"Recycling is a big thing for me . . . we've got a recycling centre not that far from us. So we'll even go to the recycling centre rather than just putting it in a bin . . . if we buy something we have to either sell it or take it to a recycling centre before we buy something else. That's just how we live. So I'd rather sell it in my local area . . . [or] give it away for free to bless someone else . . . maybe recycling encourages me to bless someone without trying to bless someone." (EE)

Recycling is viewed here as an act of generosity; it is for the benefit of the other and therefore a way of blessing others.

17 Ibid. See Section 5.

Sophie also highlighted the role of socio-economic factors, such as finances and geographical location, in constraining conservation efforts. For people of faith as for those without faith, personal circumstances can make it difficult to engage in all the environmental work we would wish to do and in the frequency we would like.

“I drive an old diesel. I know that an old diesel isn't the best thing to be driving, but I can’t physically afford an electric car. I work in an area where it's not possible to get public transport, so there are some things that are just linked to circumstances.” (SG)

These responses highlight some of the factors other than religion that shape people of faith’s engagement with conservation, such as the visibility of green issues, convenience and socio-economic factors. These insights help us to understand the complexity of faith-based environmentalism and provide insights into factors which may contribute to lower rates of Christian participation.

Judaism

Max felt that his greatest concern was the overuse of plastics. In the passage below he explains some ways he tries to conserve plastics and the tensions he perceives between reducing plastic use and traditional Jewish practices.

“I’m trying to protect the environment and be more sustainable with resources. I try to save energy and save plastic. I'm always there with my reusable water bottle and coffee flask, and I try to reduce plastic consumption. I try and buy everything loose rather than in plastic as much as I can . . . I mean, it's hard, like I can't do everything plastic-free. I wish I could, but if you go to a Jewish Supermarket, which I never go to . . . then usually everything's in plastic. It's really not great . . . and if you see people on planes . . . if you get kosher then it’s wrapped in 10 layers of plastic so it doesn’t get contaminated - again in that plastic that is going to be there forever.” (MB-N)

Max speaks to the challenges that can arise between following traditional practices and the demands of environmentalism. Responding to his concerns about the overuse of plastics, Max explains that he selects vegan meals on flights to avoid what he considers to be excessive plastic use on kosher meals.

While believing causes to be important, Rabbi Jonathan's prime interest was to protect biodiversity. Explaining that the UK is close to the bottom of the international table on biodiversity (he estimated the UK to be positioned 169th out of 190 countries), he suggested that this cause, unlike others, focuses on what we can do rather than what we shouldn’t do. Moreover, many people can find biodiversity efforts more enjoyable than other forms of conservation.

“People want to plant trees, they’re interested in preserving natural environments, and they enjoy animal and bird life. So, these are positive . . . [biodiversity] has an energy of positivity about it, which many other environmental aspects don't. They seem to be more about what we shouldn't do and here it's about what one can do and what we should do and what brings

kind of mental, emotional, spiritual joy and pleasure. So, I'm quite drawn to that area because it's attractive and I think in terms of teaching around the environment, it feels like it's a positive message rather than a negative message." (JW)

These responses show that personal environmental actions may not necessarily be driven by faith instruction. Direct action can be motivated by challenges to faith instruction and the personal rewards experienced in conservation efforts that may be entirely unconnected to faith.

Islam

Tahira emphasized the connection between wastage and disproportionate global experiences of climate change.

"Not wasting - I think that's a big one. Even things like wasting water. It's a big no, no, and of course we're all guilty of wasting to some extent but I think for me personally I try to not waste as much as possible because we see it as sinful and harmful and . . . because obviously . . . people are suffering from poverty and famine . . . we're wasting and then there's people across the world who are suffering from other problems like famine and hunger and flooding . . . so it's like a knock-on effect." (TM)

Here she expresses the pastoral foundations of religious teaching that wasting resources is sinful. For Tahira, the commandment to avoid wastage is in service of the greater good of preserving human life – and not just life within her geographical location, but life across the globe. This ties to our survey finding that 76% of Muslims reported to care about climate change because it causes human suffering.[18] Tahira suggests this concern extends to the global community, and that while the extent of human suffering in the world can inhibit direct action due to a sense of overwhelm at its vastness, it can equally motivate and sustain conservation efforts. This finding contrasts with Christian responses in our survey. Christians were the least likely to care about climate change based on human suffering.[19]

Hinduism

Shilpi explained that while her preferences for conservation issues are drawn from her faith and deeply rooted in principles of non-violence, they are also strongly influenced by her scientific background.

"I would say I believe a lot in the concept of prevention and remitting pollution, and protecting trees because trees are key to our existence and our being. So, these two issues are very important for me. Alongside, of course. . . there's the constant sense of freedom for every organism in the ecosystem . . . because every organism loves their freedom as much as we do so it's nonviolence, equality. It's not that we are at the top of the food chain . . . we are not superior in any way. No, not at all. We are a part of the whole system." (SC)

18 Ibid, p 22
19 Ibid, p.22

Tied to this emphasis on the interconnection of all existence, of being an integral part of the whole, Bansari stated it didn't seem right to privilege one issue over another because, as God is in all things, all concerns to her appeared of equal importance.

"But what we believe is that…because God is in everything, we should be taking care of everything because whether that's a person or a tree . . . like my mum used to say when I was younger – you shouldn't pick a flower after dark because they've all gone to sleep, so you're disturbing them . . . everything that's living has God within it, so if we're upsetting those things then we're really upsetting God and that's not what we want to do." (BR)

These principles of interconnection and perceiving God in all life support our survey findings on Hindu's reduced emphasis on scripture as environmental motivation, whilst having higher levels of environmental concern and action relative to Christians and Muslims. However, the interview findings also add nuance to the data, identifying possible underlying causes to the survey findings.

Buddhism

Olivia's conservation interests were shaped by the imperative for social justice arising from the disproportionate impact of climate change in the world.

"Injustice . . . the global South is feeling the effect of climate change much more than the global North and the global North is causing it and has caused it traditionally. That's a huge injustice. But then even within the UK for instance, there's injustice just in terms of how much people are exposed to . . . it's often people, minorities, who are living in those areas. So, there are all these other aspects of social justice aspects…which are so connected and I think the social justice aspects are sometimes the ones that people can feel and understand more." (OF)

The unequal effects of climate change on different groups in different global regions, explained Olivia, can and ought to be a way to connect with conservation efforts on the level of human impact.

"So maybe there's also an element of really bringing those out because that's when it comes about . . . I live in South East London and . . . two years ago or something there was the first ever cause of death recorded as being climate and pollution . . . this young girl who lived on the south circular . . . who I think died of respiratory problems . . . But that's a big case, but I don't think it's been understood enough. If people really understood that they'd be like, yes, we must get out of our cars, we must do all these things, not drive everywhere." (OF)

Olivia's emphasis on social justice echoes Hindu principles of non-violence. Both ideas are rooted in a Dharmic view of interconnection and interdependence. This view of the essential nature of existence gives rise to teachings of non-violence and thereby an imperative for social justice which can drive environmentalism.

Summary

Responses to green issues of special interest were varied across faith groups. One Christian respondent spoke to a sense that preserving the beauty of the world is to preserve God's visibility in the world. Jewish and Muslim respondents were drawn to more concrete issues like excessive waste and overuse of plastics, issues often compounded by a need for convenience amidst increasingly busy lives. Hindus and Buddhists pointed to green issues related to justice and freedom arising from the principles of non-violence and beliefs about God's presence in all existence.

These findings support and develop our survey results which showed that exclusivist Hindu respondents were most concerned about the human impact of climate change, with 82% agreeing with the statement that they care about climate change primarily because it causes human suffering.[20] Agreement with this statement dropped to 62% for exclusivist Christian respondents, who were also least likely to agree that millions of people are suffering because of climate change. This finding points to the possibility that the profound interconnection of existence held by Dharmic perspectives supports principles of social justice being intrinsically connected to environmental efforts compared to monotheistic perspectives which are more inclined to separate what they consider to be human-centred issues from environmentalism.

20 Ibid, p 22

Q 4: The disparity between attributions of importance and direct action

The first phase of this project found that while all respondents believed their religion spoke to the importance of caring for the environment, this did not often translate to people of faith taking more action than those without faith.

What are your thoughts on why religious belief in the importance of environmental care isn't leading people of faith to take more action than people without faith?

Christianity

Our survey findings showed that while 82% of Christians agreed their faith obligated them to care for the world, they reported the lowest rates of direct conservation action.[21] Elizabeth felt that Christians could often be complacent about conservation work. She attributed this to the prophecy of the second coming of Christ.

"Revelations tells us that the Lord is going to come back, so some people are just waiting . . . there's a level of comfortability that the Lord's gonna come back soon . . . Society is going to get worse. This is just the tip of the iceberg . . . a lot more worse is to come so that instead of taking action, rather than recycling and doing their part, they'd rather pray." (EE)

She described a sense of despondency in the face of the inevitable deterioration of living conditions on Earth – a demise that will be beyond human remedy. From this perspective, Christ's second coming is the only consolation. The perceived futility of conservation efforts may have led some Christians to believe that prayer is their only source of power and therefore their best course of action. This perspective, she claims, can also lead to an individualistic approach to salvation.

"You work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, so it gives people in mind that all I have to work on my own salvation because the Lord's coming back, so then it kind of takes away from the other things like looking after the environment." (EE)

Not only can the will to engage in conservation efforts be thwarted by beliefs in the world's inevitable diminishment but also by surrounding social apathy.

"We're supposed to be the light of the Earth . . . but sometimes based on your environment you kind of conform to those around you and what I mean by that is you can take care of your garden, but then if you see your neighbour's and their garden that's awful after a while you start to lose the value in your own garden because left and right what you see doesn't really encourage you to uphold your standards . . . whereas it's been ingrained in me from a child with my parents." (EE)

21 Ibid. See p 22 and Section 5.

In acknowledging the strength of social influences to negatively shape our attitudes and behaviours towards environmentalism, Elizabeth also points to the positive influence of family and faith leaders in shaping our attitudes in ways that may override other social influences.

Judaism

Conservation has not been a priority for Jews who have rather focused on "issues of post-Holocaust survival, anti-Semitism, Israel," explains Rabbi Jonathan. Yet, "despite [Jews] being late in the game," Rabbi Jonathan stated he believed progress was being made and Jews were beginning to reflect on the consequences of how they live their lives.

"But I think we're largely driven by the western civilization in which we live rather than by our faiths in this area and we've been blind to the consequences for that way of life . . . Some of it goes back to the feeling of powerlessness." (JW)

While attributing Jewish 'late coming' to conservation to concerns over more pressing issues, another respondent attributed it to prioritising convenience over environmentalism.

"I think there's a huge gap in Judaism they talk about repairing the world . . . it's a gift and you should do what you can to protect it and give back . . . but people don't do that. Convenience always comes first." (MB-N)

Max speaks here to tensions between the demands of environmentalism and the religious and secular demands of daily life. Moreover, he attributes great importance to becoming more conscious of how our ordinary daily routines impact the world and to finding some way of reconciling this with faith.

Islam

The discrepancy between acknowledging the good of environmentalism and taking proactive steps for Muslims was attributed to prioritising other more pressing concerns such as "education, health, money and family" (TM).

"Obviously there's this notion of wanting to do good deeds and doing things for the world but I think the environment is just lower down on the list of things that will be working towards and...I think that's...why it kind of gets pushed to the back. It's not that we don't want to do things for the environment, but it's just that we've got other priorities and, of course as human beings, we all have desires and goals, and ambitions and I think that just gets in the way. So even though we want to be good and we want to help the environment and not do things that are negative towards the environment, I think it just gets pushed to the back." (TM)

This passage reflects the complex interplay between multiple faith-based and secular concerns in motivating environmentalism. It suggests that environmentalism among those with faith is shaped by a complex interplay of factors that extend beyond religious beliefs and practices.

It also points to a potential difference in views of social justice between monotheistic and Dharmic perspectives. While Dharmic ideas of social justice appear rooted first in the profound interconnection of all existence, monotheistic views may have their roots in more concrete ideas of the need for social and economic stability and equality.

The interview data suggests that social justice definitions based on the intrinsic relationality of the world may prove to be a stronger motivator for environmental efforts than one based on concrete life conditions. The former more social approach may serve to draw our care and attention outwards away from the self and the latter more individualistic approach may have an increased likelihood of turning our attention inwards towards the personal even if not to the exclusion of the social. That being said, an earlier Muslim account (Tahira, p.20) made a direct connection between avoiding excessive waste of our domestic resources and the desire for others to have them. This points to the complexity of these perspectives and the variety of possible interpretations of faith principles.

Sikhism

Jasmine expressed similar concerns over prioritisation.

“I feel like it could be because there are other more imminent pressing issues that they need to take care of, like the family . . . obviously living more sustainably is more expensive.” (JC)

Family responsibilities were cited as one of the highest priorities in Sikhism, placing them above conservation concerns.

“For Sikhs, family always comes first and it's probably common in a lot of faiths . . . The environment . . . it's important, but not a priority . . . My daughter is number one. I know the environment can affect her obviously in later life but she's only six, so I still think I pray for her and her health and her happiness and that's more important than anything and I think that's probably what you've kind of found perhaps.” (JC)

Hinduism

Returning to the theme of wholeness and interdependence, Shilpi spoke to the difficulty in sustaining hopeful optimism that conservation efforts will be fruitful when humanity willfully continues to do so much that harms the planet.

“When you are in a system, it has to be smooth from top to bottom. So, if the base is waiting for an instruction from the top and in between somewhere the message got lost in translation, or it is somebody's laziness, or it is just somebody's callousness or something. In effect it all nullifies the effort and the intention of everything.” (SC)

She acknowledges it’s easier to talk about the importance of environmentalism than to make the effort to engage in conservation work.

“I want to make sure that I'm taking care of the environment we say a lot of things and believe a lot of things, but then when it actually comes to doing those things it's a lot harder to maintain . . . you have to make a lot of effort to do that.” (SC)

The active commitment to environmentalism was viewed as being especially important when conservation beliefs are rooted in religion.

“Whether you are religious or you're not religious, to be able to practice what you believe is harder and people don't always put that effort into it. It's fine for you to read your scripture and believe in your religion and stuff, but if you're not practising it then you're not really doing the right things . . . just because you're religious doesn't mean that you're gonna be taking care of your environment...to bring it to work you have to put in the same level and...commit to the action.” (BR)

As with motivation for environmentalism, Hindu respondents were typically more likely to locate motivations for personal conservation action within human nature rather than religion. Here, Supta explains that it is not faith that finally determines environmentalism, but conscience and cultural practices.

“Yeah, they follow the things that are related to faith but actually they are more concerned about themselves not the environment. I have also seen that it is not related to faith. I think it's your inner conscience . . . It may be present without faith. It comes from you, your family, because it's the education you get from your childhood . . . because faith can influence it, but everything should come from your conscience.” (SB)

While Supta distinguishes between ‘faith’ on the one hand and conscience and culture on the other, in one sense, perhaps the distinction is a little more ambiguous. Supta claims here that sustained conservation efforts require more than a motivation born of following religious obligations to care for the world. They require an interior motivation, an ‘inner knowing’ of the goodness of the action, which is the conscience. Action born of interior motivation is more steadfast and less likely to be moved by changes in emotions or exterior conditions. Supta is pointing to the role of human experience in faith.

This draws us back to the Dharmic reliance on culture and tradition, or human experience, over scripture in environmental motivation. From a distinctly Dharmic perspective, then, culture and conscience can be viewed as deeply interwoven with faith. Supta is right to distinguish between religious and cultural influences based on doctrine (a more monotheistic vantage point), but given that doctrine is not the key determinant shaping the lived experience of Dharmic traditions, perhaps conservation efforts led by conscience and culture do in fact remain shaped by faith when understood within a Dharmic framework.

Buddhism

The human impact of environmental issues was, for Olivia, a strong determining factor in shaping environmental concern and action.

“There are a lot of poverty and mental health issues, and lots of other things that people prioritize because they're more acute. I think the problem is that the climate and ecological crises are not acute enough. I mean people can feel they know that things are changing, but it hasn't really impacted people quite hard enough.” (OF)

She also noted that the climate crisis can be “a huge scary subject to face,” which can lead to “denial . . . grief and overwhelm” (OF). Feelings of overwhelm can lead to a sense of futility about conservation efforts.

“It's a very hard thing because we are sort of caught in these systems. So, even things like recycling, where people just go, “the plastics are just going to end up in landfill.” There are so many things where it feels like every effort you make is not enough.” (OF)

The combined effects of the disproportionate impact of climate change around the world and a sense of overwhelm at the scope of the problem were seen to account for the discrepancy between perceptions of importance and direct action.

Summary

While Christian and Jewish respondents offered explanations specific to their faiths, many were common to all groups. Christians suggested that conservation apathy could be attributed to beliefs about the second coming of Christ, which may be seen as the only solution to a catastrophe perceived to now lie beyond human remedy. Rabbi Jonathan suggested that Jews may not have prioritised environmentalism due to the more pressing concern in Jewish communities of addressing anti-Semitism.

While these points are essentially faith-specific they also speak to more universal explanations raised across faith groups for the disparity between beliefs and actions. These include prioritising what are felt to be more immediate concerns, such as finances or family, experiencing a sense of overwhelm and despair at the extent of the climate crisis, and the very human difficulty in committing intentions to action. Moreover, the disparity speaks to differences in immediate concerns for monotheistic faiths and Dharmic belief systems. This refers to a potential difference in views of social justice, with Dharmic ideas being rooted first in the profound interconnection of all existence and monotheistic views appearing to be rooted in more concrete ideas of the need for social and economic stability and equality.

Q 5: Voting behaviours

Despite the high importance given by faith groups to care for the environment, our research found that faith did not significantly influence voting decisions in favour of green issues.

How would you explain this and to what extent do your environmental concerns shape your political views?

Christianity

The theme of alternative, more pressing concerns also arose as an explanation for why more Christians weren't voting on green issues.[22] Here, Sophie explains how being a mother and the financial demands of parenthood shape her voting.

"We've got two main parties. The majority of it is about money and budgets, isn't it? It's what you think about even if green issues are important to you. It comes further down than what is going to make an impact on your life . . . When I vote, I look for people who will prioritise education for my children or putting money into childcare hours . . . things that are going to make a dramatic impact on my life and my circumstances." (SC-R)

Elizabeth expressed a sense of futility in voting for the Green Party in the face of what she considered their inevitable failure to secure a victory in parliament.

"There's only going to be two that will ever win which is Labour and Conservatives. The Green party has a lot of people supporting them, but they know it's one of the other two that's going to win, and it's been like that for years." (EE)

Judaism

The discrepancy in attributions of importance and voting on green policies[23] was considered by Rabbi Jonathan to lie in the focus on short-term goals that frequently typify voting habits. In contrast, Rabbi Jonathan explains that green initiatives require longer-term goals. The sacrifice of short-term incentives for longer-term incentives is, he explains, a vital step in steering voting habits towards green issues.

"I think we are hugely swayed by our short-term gains and benefits which we look for from a Manifesto. Will this kind of be good for me in the short-term future . . . the most important issue of all for our future is often just ignored . . . There's also a huge concern that the democratic system, which is infinitely better than tyrannies, is not well placed to manage environmental issues because to get re-elected you need to be relatively short-termist and these are decisions which are often difficult in the short term." (JW)

22 Ibid. See Section 5, pp 30-35
23 Ibid

Antisemitism was also thought to influence Jewish voting habits. Max stated that Jewish voters' concern for antisemitism led many to prioritise voting for the Conservative Party rather than for green initiatives.

“A lot of Jewish people don't like labour because they see them as antisemitic still do anything that they can to vote for the party . . . [the] majority Jewish people vote Conservatives because they're more Jewish friendly and Israel friendly, and they see Labour as completely antisemitic . . . I personally voted Liberal Democrats because I don't like both and so the Green Party, I think some of the initiatives they have are great and a lot of Jewish people will relate, but I think antisemitism is always going to be a bigger, more pressing issue, especially in 2024.” (MB-N)

Sikhism

This Sikh participant explained that voting choices were shaped by the perceived human impact of policies in the current socio-economic climate. She points to a hierarchy of needs that she claims supersede religious imperatives towards environmentalism.

“I think again, there are more pressing issues. There's the cost of living and there's obviously the NHS and health and education and terrorism. There's lots of, I think, more important imminent things that are gonna affect us right now than the environment. I suppose to my generation, like I'm 39 - I'll be fine, I think and hope my daughter will be, but I think there are other issues that take priority that are more concerning. If we can't afford to live or whatever, with inflation and the taxes and all of that, then what does the environment mean? You kind of think of the issues that are really pressing right now.” (JC)

The sense of futility of voting for the Green Party was echoed by Parmi, who explained, “It's not gonna make a difference . . . Your vote is wasted unless you vote for Labour or Conservative” (PM). Yet she was hopeful the political landscape could change; “But why not give someone else a chance because the other two haven't done much for us in the last few years.”

However, the prioritisation of needs was equally evident in Parmi’s account. As in many respondent’s narratives, parenthood was a significant factor in shaping concerns.

“I'm a mum I read the child policies and NHS because around here you can never get a doctor's appointment and waiting lists for the hospitals around here are ridiculous . . . My concerns are more for my child's future.” (PM)

Hinduism

Participants reported a general sense of disillusionment with political parties. This suggests people may be reluctant to vote on green issues not because they believe them to be unimportant, but because they have no faith in politicians to follow through with their policies.

“I think mostly what happens is when people need votes, they'll promise anything and when they are elected in power, all they remember is now I have the power so I can do whatever I

actually want to do and not what I promised these minions who worked it for me. So, now it's five years of absolute power for me and in between I'll throw in a good deed or two so I remain in power. So I think that's what makes people disillusioned and totally not inclined towards voting for a particular party because they are seeing that every single party is doing just the same. How different can this one be?" (SC)

Buddhism

This passage highlights the potential role of communities in encouraging voting on green initiatives by providing a deeper sense of accountability to other group members.

"There's a separation between what I do privately as a religious spiritual human being and what I do publicly. I think that is separated quite a lot in our society . . . I'd say that a lot of people might think certain things at home, but they don't always take action on that . . . Individually it's too easy to not take action. We're not accountable, we sometimes don't see ourselves as accountable. Whereas collectively you might take action more." (OF)

The implication is that a collective effort will be required to significantly change our political landscape.

Summary

A common thread running through accounts across faith groups was a sense of disillusionment and futility in voting on green issues. This despondency was not attributed to a belief that green policies would not be followed through, but rather to a combination of beliefs on the inevitability of political outcomes and a need to vote on issues of immediate concern and impact. The recurring theme that environmentalism is often subordinated to concerns that are felt to more directly impact respondents' lives was shown to influence voting behaviours. This may lead to the kinds of voting on short-term goals identified by Rabbi Jonathan, which diminishes the likelihood of voting on green lines, which requires a shift towards long-term goals.

Question 6: Specific faith-based questions

Christianity

Our research found that Christians were more likely than other religious groups to deny climate change and take less action towards environmental issues.[24] Yet Christians also believed, in equal measure to other religious groups, that they have a responsibility given to them by their faith to care for the environment.

What are your thoughts on these findings of higher climate change denial and less action towards green concerns in Christian groups?

Participants most commonly attributed climate change denial by Christians to beliefs on the second coming of Christ. Sophie explained that "maybe Christians are denying climate change because they believe that Jesus will return before that happens" (SC-R). From this perspective, Christians might believe that Christ's second coming means "that we're not going to get to that stage" (SC-R). However, Sophie said she struggled to understand how climate change could be denied.

Another respondent expressed how a belief in Christ's return could be viewed as finally protecting humanity from the full impact of climate change.

"I suppose Christians then think, 'Well, God's in charge of the Earth, and the world is not going to end because of climate change, the world is going to end when Jesus comes again for the judgement. Perhaps that's why." (Anon)

This viewpoint ties to a similar theme that climate change denial could be a consequence of a Christian belief that "human destiny is in God's hand" (Anon) coupled with a "focus on the afterlife rather than stewardship" (Anon).

Some participants were keen to distance themselves from Christian climate change deniers. One respondent did this by positioning climate change deniers in other denominations, citing them as predominantly evangelicals: they "show higher denial [and] are less active in environmental concerns" (Anon).

In stark contrast to relying on apocalyptic narratives, one participant explained climate denial through science-scepticism, linking it to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

"A lot of scientists don't have a belief in God. A lot of scientists believe in evolution, while a majority of Christians don't, as they are creationists. From the very start [some Christians]

24 Ibid, pp. 12-19

will be very suspicious of science . . . There's a part of me that says, if we are having global warming, then why are summers so bad? Summers were way hotter when I was a kid." (Anon)

This suggests that perceiving some scientific concepts as incompatible with religious doctrine might feed a 'scepticism' towards anything scientific - be it climate, or other 'conspiracy theories,' which other participants claimed certain Christian groups would be much more likely to accept.

Elizabeth explained that climate change denial could be attributed to a profound distrust of the media.

"There's that thing propaganda with everything that happens in the news . . . So, there's a sense that the media tries to make people feel anxious. It's very difficult for people to trust what they hear . . . It's sad, but I think the reason for it is that over time . . . the community has lost faith in what they read and what they hear from the news . . . whether it's about climate or the environment." (EE)

She contrasted fears over the credibility of media reporting with God's consistency and stability to emphasise that what is stable and constant can be trusted (the divine) and what is impermanent and uncertain cannot (the world).

"The Bible says Jesus remains the same yesterday and forever . . . but society's constantly changing . . . We notice that it's getting worse, but the Bible lets us know that God remains the same." (EE)

Higher rates of climate change denial among Christians may have multiple causes, some of which these accounts suggest may not have their origins in scripture. While reliance on Christ's second coming is significant, respondents also suggest that scepticism of the media and areas of scientific inquiry may be fueling climate change denial among Christians.

Judaism

What is your experience of how Jewish communities view and take action towards environmental issues?

Rabbi Jonathan highlights a growing interest in environmentalism within Jewish communities. While he considers this promising, he would like to see more radical efforts being made.

"The Jewish Community is very varied, so I can't really speak for the whole of the Jewish Community, but we now have seventy-five plus communities participating in some of the wider inter-community bodies . . . we're trying very hard to catch up. The Jewish environmental movements are quite strong in America and we've had a lot of international interest in the Eco Judaism project . . . so, I think there's an increasing understanding that these things are important and that working on our environmental footprint is essential. Unfortunately, quite often, it's not understood radically enough." (JW)

One respondent emphasised the importance of individual responsibility over the instructions of religious leaders and communities. For them, while religious communities strengthen the more prescribed aspects of faith, environmental action is driven more by interior motivations and the connections individuals make with what they see and know.

"A doctor may be very skilled in medicine. It's the same with religion and environmentalism. I'm not going to follow a Rabbi that says XYZ just because they are a religious leader. I am a person that likes to do their own thinking. I follow a religion, but I am not a 'follower' per say. I need to think for myself and decide what the right thing to do is." (Anon)

Similarly, a different participant explained that because of their faith, they live in ways that are inevitably more environmental than how they might otherwise be living. Being part of the wider Jewish community allows them to interpret actions from an environmentalist perspective, where they engage in conservation efforts for their community and their future generations.

"[Having a faith] does help in regards to having a structured belief system. It helps in terms of making one think outside of oneself and about how the actions of one can affect the environment and affect others." (Anon)

Jewish interest in environmentalism is growing. These accounts point to environmentalism as an organic expression of Jewish beliefs on love and relationality and to the importance of intrinsic motivations in sustaining interest and commitment to conservation.

Islam

Our research showed that Muslim respondents were significantly less likely than Christian and Hindu respondents to believe there was no need to be overly concerned about climate change because God will restore the world.

How do you think the end-of-times prophecies in Islam influence concern for and actions towards the environment, if at all?

"Even with our belief in what will happen at the end of times, I still feel like as a Muslim it's important to consider the environment." (TM)

Most Muslim participants disagreed that end-of-times prophecies impacted their views on climate change. This was rooted in an understanding that this world is a 'test' and one of these 'tests' is that of climate change. Muslim's sense of responsibility for conservation appeared independent of end-of-time prophecies.

"I think [the apocalypse] should be put to one side. What we should think about as Muslims, is that this is our 'test' in this world to ensure that we do everything that we can to protect the environment." (Anon)

This perspective addresses the age-old question among Muslims of fate versus choice. When it is accepted that God knows all – the past, present, and future – why are humans 'tested'?

The mainstream view is that the 'test' is not to determine the outcome (which God already knows), but rather to give humans agency over the outcome. In essence, while God knows the outcomes of these 'tests,' God does not force us to act one way or the other, ensuring that as humans, we take responsibility for our actions and their outcomes - whatever these may be.

"Do I focus so much on the present that I compromise my afterlife? Or, do I prioritise my present in such a way that will only benefit me in my afterlife? The certainty of the future doesn't absolve us of our responsibilities in the present." (Anon)

This participant explains how beliefs in the omnipresence and omnipotence of God can shape Muslims' attitudes toward conservation.

"If Judgement Day is coming, we need to do the best we can, so that when it does come, Allah will look in our favour. If we can do anything, even if it's something as small as recycling, reducing meat intake, or trying to be a better citizen in society, that's going to be in our favour. There shouldn't be something like 'we should just wait and see what happens' because you're going to be judged for that as well. You're going to be judged for not doing anything. So might as well do better." (Anon)

These accounts affirm the importance of ethical human activity and accountability. Respondents speak to doing the right thing for its own sake. Regardless of what the future holds, people are ultimately accountable for their actions, especially in how they choose to use their human agency to respond to the world's needs.

Viewing climate change as one of the many 'tests' of this world could lead to a more 'active' approach to climate change than those shaped by beliefs about God's omnipotence and second coming. Muslim approaches to climate change as a test, a challenge to which we must rise seem more conducive to direct conservation action than Christian approaches emphasising God's power and intended restoration of the Earth. The latter is more open to a passive reliance on God and the former to a greater reliance on the correct use of human agency regardless of expected or prophesied outcomes. These interpretations support our survey findings on the relationship between attitudes to climate change and faith. Our results showed that 83% of Muslims agreed that God has given humans the responsibility to care for the world compared to 57% of Christians.[25]

Hinduism

Our research showed that Hindu respondents were less likely than respondents from other faiths to view environmental concerns and actions towards these concerns as a responsibility given by their faith.

What are your thoughts on this finding and what do you think distinguishes Hindu motivations from other faiths to care for the environment in the absence of religious obligation?

25 Ibid. See section 3, pp. 20-23.

Here Shilpi explains the sources of her motivation and conviction in environmentalism. She specifically points to the importance of 'practical knowledge' in driving her conservation efforts.

"It has been 50% doctrine and 50% of the training and . . . the upbringing that I have had . . . So [some] would be my qualifications and the roles that I have been in as a scientist . . . . other than the bookish language, the practical knowledge also helps you see things more clearly and develop a holistic viewpoint." (SC)

Hinduism teaches that every encounter with the world is an encounter with the divine, explains Bansari, and experiencing this relationship affirms the imperative of practising faith in addition to studying its doctrines.

"We should be taking care of her because she is the one that provides us where we live . . . So, it's not like they're telling us all you need to look after it . . . [we do it] because it's a goddess. Indirectly, that's what you're meant to do. I guess it doesn't say it explicitly, so maybe it's not a motivating thing for people because you have to read between the lines or you have to really practice it." (BR)

This engagement with the world as an engagement with the divine goddess is here expressed as a fundamental source of motivation to care for the environment. In Bansari's words, to care for the world is to love God. This care is not enacted through obligation, but rather a movement of the 'heart.'

"It's about that love between you and God . . . that relationship between you and God and how that flourishes and all the love that it brings . . . when you surrender yourself to God everything else falls in place . . . it's about giving yourself, every part of you to the garden . . . and kind of whatever you're doing in life is a way to go back to God." (BR)

While Bansari distances care for the environment from scriptural obligations, she situates her motivation within the principles of Karma.

"We also believe in reincarnation, so all the Karma, everything that we do in life now, will dictate what happens after we die and . . . so, if we are surrendering ourselves to God and doing all the right things then there is a higher chance of us getting more which is Salvation." (BR)

The very nature of humanity's relationship with God is also affirmed as a strong motivator in environmentalism. This is a relationship without fear. This means one takes direct action not in fear of the consequences of non-compliance with scriptural commandments but because one knows the action's value through one's conscience.

"We don't fear God we respect . . . . so it comes from respect and . . . what you believe, so we have that freedom . . . in our faith we have that freedom. I think you decide on your own." (SB)

A sense of belonging to a community (which needn't be religious) was also expressed as a motivation to care for the world.

“We don’t really have ‘binding doctrine’ that tells us to act a certain way. It’s up to religious leaders to make environmentalism more relevant and make actions more prescriptive.” (Anon)

The term ‘community’ was not however monolithic. When asked about a sense of belonging to a community, this respondent referred to her Indian ancestry in Punjab, not the community at her local Gurdwara or her community of Sikhs in the United Kingdom.

“If you look at India and you look at the Punjab, [Sikhs] come from an agricultural farming background. My ancestry is agricultural. So, acres of farmland is preserved through generations and it’s kept safe (as farmland) because it’s ancestral land. And that in itself is brilliant for the environment. We feed the world.” (Anon)

Generational teaching on principles such as non-violence was also shown to be an important determinant in shaping environmental concerns, especially among children and young people.

“If the family imparts these values (Ahimsa) at a very early point in life and teaches us about conserving the environment and being nonviolent to all living things and all those things…then I think people in my religion are stricter with these beliefs and they hold these beliefs quite dear to the heart.” (Anon)

Hindu motivation for environmentalism draws on tradition and practical knowledge. While not explicitly rooted in Vedic scriptures, their inspiration can be seen in references to principles of Karma, non-violence and the presence of God in all existence. This emphasis on human experience that is viewed to be inspired by and confirmatory of Vedic scriptures resonates with Sikh and Buddhist accounts. The lived experience of faith as the final ‘litmus test’ of its wisdom is a key feature of Dharmic traditions. This contrasts with the emphasis in monotheistic traditions on scriptural observance.

Environmentalism then becomes a spiritual practice that draws Hindus deeper into their faith as they encounter and worship God in and through the visible world. These practices are enriched, cultivated and transmitted through communities living out the practical wisdom of the Vedas.

Sikhism

What is your experience of how Sikh communities view and take action towards environmental issues?

In this passage, a participant expresses the significance of Seva, which means voluntary service and the importance of reducing waste.

“Within our community, we do Seva. When you look at how food is served, it’s served in reusable steel plates that can be used up to 30 years. They are not using disposable plates - everything is reusable. Another thing is that there are more and more groups every day

working within communities - litter picking and cleaning up the environment. And in terms of our place of worship, when I go to my local Gurdwara, there are green areas, and we are encouraged to walk." (Anon)

There is a sense of harmony and interconnection of faith and environmental efforts that also resonates with Hindu and Buddhist perspectives. One appears to blend seamlessly into the other. The ethical imperative to care is equally matched by an experience of God in the world, a lived experience of kindness and connection to the Earth and its inhabitants, which drives motivation to protect our planet's resources.

Buddhism

Our research showed that environmental concerns in many religions were predominantly shaped by the idea of a creator God who is viewed to have given humanity stewardship over the Earth. Yet, while Buddhists believe in gods, they do not believe in a creator God.

What do you think distinguishes Buddhist motivations from other faiths to care for the environment in the absence of belief in a creator God?

This respondent explained that some of the features of the 'creator God' of other faiths can be seen in Buddhism as in Hinduism in the law of Karma – a universal law of cause and effect.

"We believe in cause and effect. The universe puts things together, and we always have to trust the process. So yes, we don't have a creator God, but there is an invisible hand guiding everybody's life. This invisible hand puts things together that cause an outcome, kind of like building blocks." (Anon)

In contrast, Olivia explained that atheistic Buddhist traditions speak of a "life force" in constant evolution towards higher levels of consciousness that confers an extraordinary potential upon every human person.

"With the form of Buddhism [I practice], we don't have any Gods at all . . . we believe in life and the absolute interconnection of all things, so life is like a life force . . . some people might say, that's God and it's the same thing. But there's nothing outside of ourselves that's created . . . we are part of life which is experiencing itself . . . life [is] constantly evolving and creating itself and we're part of that and so we can contribute to the positive evolution . . . it's like life is becoming more and more conscious of itself, and I'd say we are." (OF)

This means that human beings are "not above any other life form in any way" but "part of that aspect of life understanding itself" (OF).

"We have this extraordinary potential that we don't tap into most of the time . . . we have this potential of really transforming ourselves and I think we do have to start with ourselves. We can't just try and transform what's outside of ourselves, but we have to transform what's in us with the understanding that through doing that we can change the systems . . . " (OF)

For Olivia, we all possess an extraordinarily high potential called Buddhahood or Buddha nature. This potential must be “tapped into,” we must “bring it out” if we are to affect any real change in the world. Olivia saw this as the source of motivation and power to contribute to climate efforts.

Realising Buddha nature, she explains, realises our greatest potential for the courage and compassion required to “overcome the social injustices that we've created.”

“Our interconnection that allows us to really appreciate nature is really how we appreciate each other. Yes, and we may not travel quite as much or there are certain things that we might have to let go of, but I think we will gain so much more because we can gain from really appreciating life.” (OF)

Buddhist motivations for environmentalism can be distinguished from those of other faiths by the absence of a creator God. This is replaced by a belief in a guiding benevolent intelligence that is not something in which humanity merely participates, but is humanity’s essential nature and greatest potential. This “life force” animates the visible world, connecting all existence in such profound interdependence that it gives rise to the law of cause and effect. Buddhist environmentalism stems from this sense of interconnection, the profound potential of life in all existence in which all can thrive.

Conclusion

The interview data shows that motivations for conservation within faith communities are complex and diverse. Our findings reflect a dynamic interplay of religious, cultural, social, political and economic factors that can often be in tension. Participants cited tensions between traditional practices, environmental demands and socio-cultural trends towards consumerism. Motivations are paradoxically then rooted in tradition and scripture even as they are dynamic and situational.

However, there were also clear faith-based reasons for environmentalism. Respondents of all faiths expressed concern for the environment through narratives of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Put simply, this refers to the distinction between motivations driven by the 'intellect' in the form of compliance with scriptural instructions and those driven by the 'heart,' by a desire to know and love God or encounter the transcendent through the world and to become the person one feels called to be. All participants explained that their environmental concerns were rooted in more than a desire to follow commandments. Their concerns were also rooted in a desire to know and love something far greater than themselves. Our findings showed that for people of faith, environmentalism involves the heart as much as it does the mind, and to this end, it can be viewed as an expression of love.

Tied to this idea is the profound sense of connection to the world and a vision of all things in the world as being intrinsically interconnected and interdependent which participants agreed was a strong motivator in conservation work. From this perspective, God or the transcendent is encountered and loved through the world. When we care for the planet, we care for all humanity and God.

This was acutely true for those of the Dharmic traditions, which emphasised a vision of all existence as an "ecosystem." The profound sense of interconnection with the world held by Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists led to a deeper experience of relationality that inspired and sustained conservation efforts. Dharmic emphasis on the experience of faith was associated with a greater affirmation of intrinsic motivations inspired by principles of Karma and non-violence.

The deep sense of relationality held by Dharmic traditions shaped a conception of social justice as a strong motivating factor that differed from monotheistic perspectives. While Dharmic ideas of social justice appear rooted first in the profound interconnection of all existence, monotheistic views appear rooted in more concrete ideas of the need for social and economic stability and equality. Social justice definitions based on the intrinsic relationality of the world appeared as stronger motivators for environmental efforts than those based on concrete life conditions.

Dharmic and monotheistic traditions also differed in beliefs on the sources of environmental motivation and direct conservation action. Dharmic traditions were less likely to attribute their environmental motivation to scriptural observance than monotheistic traditions due to an increased emphasis on the experience of faith, practical knowledge and a view of all existence

being connected through the transcendent. They also reported higher rates of direct conservation action. Monotheistic faiths were more likely to attribute their environmental motivation to scriptural instruction but reported lower rates of conservation efforts.

An interesting contrast was also revealed between Islam and Christianity in attitudes towards climate change. Muslims were more likely to view climate change as one of the many 'tests' of this world, leading to a more 'active' approach to climate change than Christians whose views were more likely to be shaped by beliefs about God's omnipotence and second coming. Viewing climate change as a test, a challenge to which we must rise might be more conducive to motivating conservation efforts than approaches emphasising God's power and intended restoration of the Earth. The latter implies a passive reliance on God while the former implies a greater reliance on the proper use of human agency regardless of expected or prophesied outcomes.

Respondents expressed the possibility for personal transformation in the encounter with God or the transcendent in caring for the environment. In this sense, for people of faith, conservation efforts are more than something they do. These efforts reflect who they are and who they aspire to be. That is, their efforts convey something important about their character. Environmentalism can then be a journey of holiness, transcendence or self-realisation, an ordained path in and towards something experienced as far greater than themselves. Put another way, when we care for the world, we encounter a transcendent life force that is our greatest human potential and by which we are transformed into the highest version of ourselves.

Regardless of what one believes, there seems to be an agreement that something greater than ourselves can be known and experienced through environmentalism and that this greater force has the power to realise our essential human potential in this life and the next.

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